THE MAGAZINE

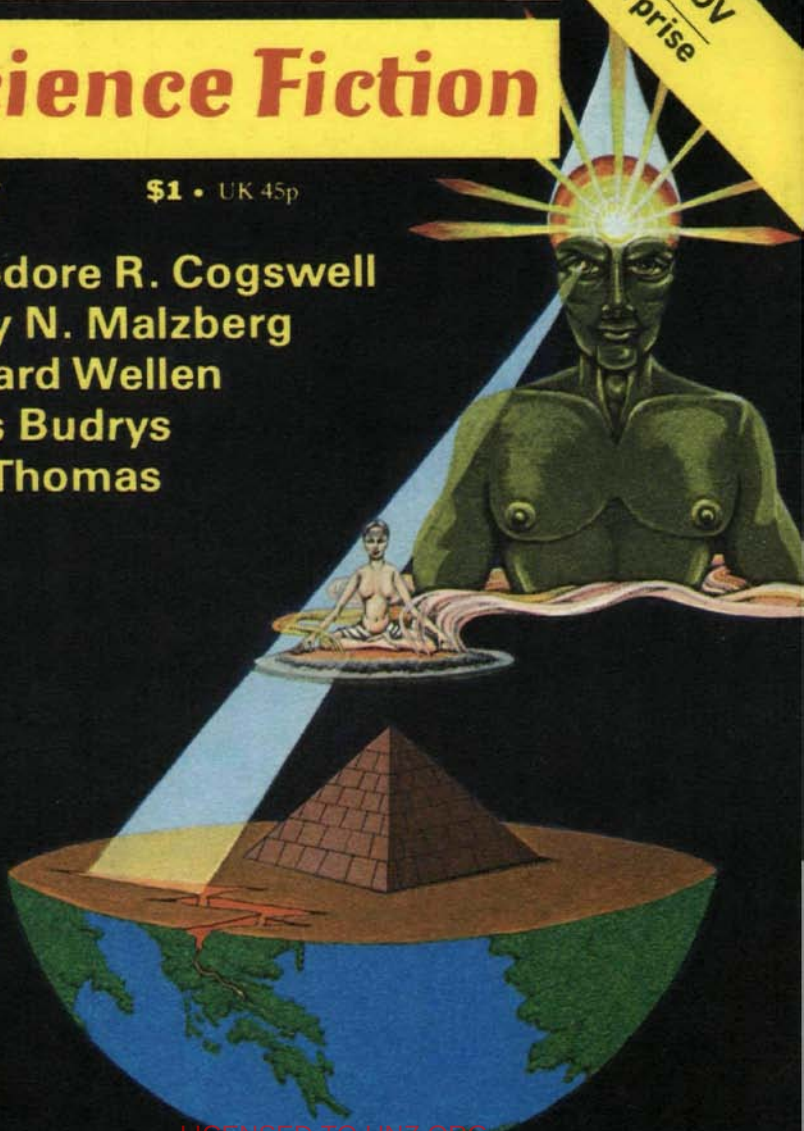
Fantasy AND Science Fiction

JULY

$1 • UK 45p

ISAAC ASIMOV
Titanic Surprise

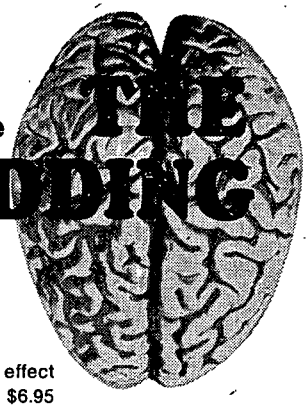
Theodore R. Cogswell
Barry N. Malzberg
Edward Wellen
Algis Budrys
Ted Thomas



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"If one is predicting what science fiction will be like in ten years, I would expect Watson to be playing a key role in it."*



THE EMBEDDING

Ian Watson

This arresting novel about mind control and what happens to three separate groups who must achieve it to survive "brilliantly attempts to communicate a precarious truth about what we think is actuality . . . The effect is quite hallucinating."—*The London Times* $6.95

*ABC of British Science Fiction

ODD JOB #101 And Other Future Crimes and Intrigues
Ron Goulart "These short stories are a happy blend of science fiction with detection and intrigue, told with Goulart's inimitable dry humor."—*The Kirkus Reviews* $5.95

THE FEAST OF ST. DIONYSUS Five Science Fiction Stories
Robert Silverberg "Among Silverberg's best. One of the first rank of SF authors, he is a master at drawing the reader into the times and places of which he writes with style, wit, and imagination."—*Library Journal* $6.95

A PLACE BEYOND MAN
Cary Neeper A vivid novel about a female scientist's encounter with two intelligent non-human species, all of them concerned with the earth's ecological crisis. $7.95

At your bookstore or order from
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
Dept MN, 597 Fifth Ave.
New York 10017

Please send me
___**The Embedding** @ $6.95
___**Odd Job #101** @ $5.95
___**The Feast of St. Dionysus** @ $6.95
___**A Place Beyond Man** @ $7.95

I enclose check/money order for_____, which includes 50¢ for handling and postage, plus necessary sales tax.

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State_____ Zip_____

(This offer expires 12/31/75)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

Including Venture Science Fiction

JULY • 26TH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

NOVELLA

DEADPAN — **EDWARD WELLEN** — 5

NOVELET

A GALAXY CALLED ROME — **BARRY N. MALZBERG** — 105

SHORT STORIES

OWLS — **VANCE AANDAHL** — 89

PLAYERS AT NULL-G — **ALGIS BUDRYS, THEODORE R. COGSWELL and TED THOMAS** — 99

A DROP OF DRAGON'S BLOOD — **PHILIP LATHAM** — 123

A DAY IN THE APOTHEOSIS OF THE WELFARE STATE — **PHYLLIS MACLENNAN** — 145

FOR THE BIRDS — **STEPHEN BARR** — 156

DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS — **RICHARD DELAP** — 80

FILMS: Simulacra Suburbia — **BAIRD SEARLES** — 95

CARTOON — **GAHAN WILSON** — 98

SCIENCE: Titanic Surprise — **ISAAC ASIMOV** — 135

ACROSTIC PUZZLE — **GEORGIA F. ADAMS** — 154

Cover by Mazey and Schell for "Deadpan"

Edward L. Ferman, EDITOR & PUBLISHER — Isaac Asimov, SCIENCE EDITOR

Hank Davis, ASSISTANT EDITOR — Dale Beardale, CIRCULATION MANAGER

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 49; No. 1, Whole No. 290, July 1975. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $1.00 per copy. Annual subscription $10.00; $11.00 in Canada and Mexico, $12.00 in other foreign countries. Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Editorial submissions should be sent to 347 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A.

Copyright © 1975 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is a fine and wild thriller concerning a project to restore the Delphic Oracle around a computer installation, the mysterious death of the computer's designer, and the investigations of his son. Ed Wellen's novella "Mouthpiece" (F&SF, February 1974) was recently nominated for a Nebula award.

Deadpan

by EDWARD WELLEN

PROLOGUE

On its own planet it had its own shape. It shifted shape every now and then to break the long time of aloneness. But always it came back to itself. Often it thought/dreamed of splitting itself into two or more — to keep itself company, to set up a mutual admiration society, or simply to make speaking to itself look less mad in its own ears. But that would not have been the way its unique kind begat itself.

Then at last came the time of birth-death, which was the way of its unique kind. It did not know why, but the thing had to happen so, and so it did what it had to do. After burying its seed and lifting off, it let itself become all gas and so took the shape of the space vessel it filled. It did not need a beat to be alive, but the heat and pull of stars it passed on its long way to nowhere chain-stoked an erratic spaced-out pseudo-pulse that might have been the ghostly stirrings of a chickless egg.

Some eighty-two light-years from home it said yes to the pull of an unassuming star and lighted on a planet of that star. Here it would wait out the flare of its own sun, Alpha Phoenicis. When the time came to make the journey back, it would leave the host planet and retrace its way homeward.

Would it find awaiting it a renewed planet of a purified solar system? Would it find awaiting it on the renewed planet its newborn mate-child, the seed that would have come through the fire and burst into fleshflower out of the ashes of the blitz? If not, this would have been only one small bit more of waste in a wasteful universe. Meanwhile ....

Meanwhile its life was an ongoing meanwhile on the planet Earth.

This meanwhile began when

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hector was a pup — before the ticks of time dogging him caught up with him around the walls of windy Troy. In the month of Gamelion in what would be the year 1221 B.C., the spacecraft from Alpha Phoenicis IV shot in alongside the blue - and - white immie. After breaking atmosphere, the spacecraft stood on its fiery point, then splashed down and hissed out into the wine-dark sea. It rolled in the slow swells of the Pagasaean Gulf.

A dolphin nosed the vessel, trying to get the thing to play. Burnt, the dolphin shied away. Then it came back and circled the thing in puzzlement. Sensing mind-stuff in the offing, the gas inside the vessel unsealed the lock. Before the dolphin could sheer away, the gas breathed itself out into the blowhole and into the brain of the dolphin.

As gas rushed out, the craft lost buoyancy and sank to the sandy bottom.

The dolphin leaped. The dolphin sounded. But it could not escape its withinness. At weary last it gave in to the ghost rule of the gas.

It was a narrow world the gas saw through the lens of the dolphin. But the gas was joyous with release and mad with curiosity. It stayed with the dolphin and learned.

It learned of humans. More than once the dolphin saved a shipwrecked sailor. More than once sailors sought to net or hook or spear the dolphin. In these encounters the gas put forth unseen tendrils of sensitive smoke to screen human mind-stuff. The gas had soon tired of dolphining, but no human mind-stuff promised more than the dolphin's.

But in these encounters the gas got sea wind of mind-stuff humans believed godlike.

It swung the dolphin from the Pagasaean Gulf down past the Gulf of Mali and through the Euboean Sea, skirted the school of Cyclades, rounded the Peloponnesus — there was no Corinth canal in those days — into the Ionian Sea, entered the Gulf of Corinth, and hugged the shore near the town of Itea. They — the gas equably but the dolphin lacklusterly by reason of the forced swim — watched cookfires and lamps yield to night.

At break of day a red-fingered maiden bearing the name Phemonoe and a head load of washing came down to where the river flowed into the gulf. As the girl knelt and beat clothes on a white rock, the gas beached the dolphin. While the girl stayed stiff as with starch, the gas left the dolphin to the gases of death and breathed itself into the brain of the girl.

It lifted Phemonoe up and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

headed her home. It paused Phemonoe for a moment to admire the hues of the dying dolphin, a play of color much like the thin-film effect. Phemonoe returned home with a vision that saved her from a beating for abandoning the clothes.

To the people of Itea she had always seemed a touch mad. Now they found Apollo spoke through her. As word spread, they brought her up to Delphi, where everyone knew Apollo issued visions through fissures in the earth. Phemonoe became the first Pythia, the spokeswoman of the Oracle.

In time, as Apollo continued to speak through each Pythia in turn, people built a temple to Apollo, a shrine for the Oracle.

The Oracle spoke to man for a millennium. For a millennium, man pilgrimaged to Delphi for the grim pill of the Oracle. The gas being a laughing gas, the Oracle spoke in riddles. Man being man, the riddles took on sugar coating.

> *Item.* After their last king died, the Megarians sent to Delphi to ask what way of governing would give them happiness. The Pythia said, "Let those who sit in authority / Take counsel with the majority." The fat cats of Megara, not wishing to share their power, decided that "the majority" meant the dead. This kindled the stratagem of building their council chamber around the tomb of some heroes, who, being of the silent majority, would not dispute their rulings.

Item. The Sybarites sent to Delphi to ask how long they would go on living in luxury. The Pythia said, "Gay folk of Sybaris, yea, all gay, / Your pleasures will last until the day / You reverence not gods but a mortal; / Then war and strife will topple your portal." As the Sybarites could not see themselves putting a man above the gods, they took this to mean that their good times would last forever. One day a Sybarite whipped a slave of his even after the slave sought sanctuary at the temple of Hera; but when the slave fled to the tomb of his master's father, the master, out of respect for his father, stopped the flogging. The Sybarites saw nothing strange in this — all but one Amyris. He had gone on the mission to Delphi and saw this as the fulfillment of the oracle. At

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

once he turned all he owned into cash and left Sybaris. The Sybarites looked upon him as mad for leaving the good life. Soon afterward, the neighboring city of Croton razed Sybaris to the ground.

Item. The Pythia told an overbearing rich man that Apollo held in higher esteem the poor man from Hermione who had just poured a handful of barley from his wallet. Overhearing this, the poor man spilled out the rest of his barley on the altar. At which the Pythia said that now the poor man would reap twice as much hatred as he had garnered love before.

Item. One day there came a man who thought to show the Oracle up. He palmed a live sparrow and asked the Pythia to tell if what he held was alive or dead. If the Pythia said "dead," he had only to open his hand to show the sparrow alive. If she said "alive," he had only to squeeze and show the sparrow dead. The Pythia said, "Man, you can show it alive or dead, / It is in your hands to snap the thread."

Item. Three youths from the same city made their way toward Delphi. They ran into a band of robbers. One youth drew his sword, another fled, the third drew his sword to stand with his friend but in striking a blow at a robber missed the robber and slew his friend. To the one who fled, the Pythia said, "You failed your friend when he looked death in the face. / I will not speak to you. Leave this holy place." To the other survivor she said, "You killed your friend but bear no stain of his gore. / Your hands are cleaner than they were before."

Item. Anacharsis, the Scythian philosopher, asked the Oracle if there were anyone wiser than himself. The Pythia said, "Myson of Chen in Oeta; this is he / Who for wiseheartedness surpasseth thee." Nettled, Anacharsis went to see for himself. It was summertime and his furrowed brow smoothed when he found Myson fitting a share to a plow. Anacharsis said,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Myson, this is not the season for the plow." "It is just the time to fix it," Myson said.

(Speaking of plows, Erginus, old and alone in the world, came to Delphi to ask the Oracle if life had passed him by. The Pythia said, "Never too late while there's Now. / Fix a new tip to your plow." He married a young wife and begat a son.)

Item. Oedipus, seething at a slur on his begetting, limped to Delphi to ask about his paternity. The Pythia told him he would kill his father and marry his mother. To keep from carrying out the oracle, he did not return to Corinth but made towards Thebes. Coming to a tight place in the road, a sphincter almost, he got into a trivial argument over the right of way. He killed the old man in a chariot who tried to make him yield. Catharsis. But this was Oedipus's real father, who, in response to an earlier oracle had sent the baby Oedipus out to die and was now himself on his way to Delphi to ask again about his future.

Item. The Pythia told Philip II of Macedon, "If you would truly be the king of kings, / Then fight with silver spears and rule all things." And it proved so, once Philip realized that the Oracle meant the small silver spits that passed as currency; his use of bribes paid off.

Item. Alexander the Great found the Pythia not in a mood to prophesy. He took hold of her and dragged her to the sacred tripod, where she gasped out, "My son, you are invincible!" Alexander nodded and went on about his conquering.

Item. Diogenes came to Delphi and asked what he should aim at now that his home town of Sinope had exiled him. The Oracle told him, "Deface the currency!" Now, Diogenes was in exile for having done just that; his father had been Master of the Mint, and the two of them had alienated the many be seizing false coins and defacing them with a cold chisel. Still, Diogenes weighed Apollo's words in troy measure and saw what the god meant. Deface the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

currency! Apollo meant him to chisel through the current values and bare the alloy beneath the silver plating. Diogenes began by stripping himself of belongings, breaking even his wooden bowl when he saw a farm boy cup hands to drink. He took to carrying his lighted lamp through noontime throngs, looking for someone who rang true. His fame grew so that Alexander the Great, passing through Corinth, paid him a call. Alexander reined in before the barrel Diogenes called home and asked what he might do for Diogenes. Diogenes, scribbling away, said Alexander might stop standing between him and the sun. Alexander, looking to posterity, said, "If I were not Alexander, I would be Diogenes," and rode on, leaving Diogenes richer by a steaming turd.

Item. King Croesus of Lydia came to Delphi bearing gifts and asked the Oracle whether it was propitious for him to invade Persia. The Oracle told him that if he marched into Persia he would destroy a mighty empire. Croesus marched his army into Persia and destroyed a mighty empire — his own.

Item. The Athenians pressed the Delphic Oracle to tell them how they would fare against the invading Persians under Xerxes. The Pythia told them, "The wooden wall / Will never fall ..." Xerxes' archers lashed torches to their arrows and burned the wooden barricades in the acropolis at Athens. That wooden wall having fallen, Themistocles worked and connived to convince his fellow Greeks that "wooden wall" meant the Greek fleet. The Athenians pulled back with their navy to Salamis. And there, outnumbered but not outfought, the Greek wooden wall destroyed the Persian.

Item. A mission from Delos appealed to Apollo for help in ending a long run of hard luck. The Pythia told the Delians to go home and double in size the altar to Apollo. The altar was a cube, and the masons of Delos hewed a new cube having double the dimensions of the old. The Delians

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dedicated it and made sacrifices. But the hard luck ran on. Having lost faith in the Delphic Oracle, the islanders sent a second mission, this time to a new shrine, Plato's Academy at Athens. Plato heard the Delians out, then told them they had not doubled the cube, they had made the volume eight times as great. Their hard luck was of their own making; they had failed to keep up with science. If they had studied geometry, they would have known to multiply the edge of the cube by the cube root of 2.

Item. Nero's eyes lit up when the Delphic Oracle said, "Beware the seventy-third year." Only thirty at the time, he felt he could safely debauch till his seventies. The next year he had to kill himself to save himself from dying at the hands of his rebel general Galba — who was in his seventy-third year.

Served Nero right. Nero had despoiled the shrine of 500 bronze statues, melting them down for weapons or coins (debased shades of Philip's silver spears!). But by now the gas had wearied of humanity and of scoring off humans. It withdrew more and more into itself, and the Oracle fell into disrepute and the shrine into ruin.

Some 300 years after the Emperor Nero, the Emperor Julian would have restored the shrine to its former glory. The gas turned him down.

"Tell the Emperor the bright citadel is fallen to the ground; Apollo has no longer any shelter or prophetic laurel tree or speaking fountain. Even the stream of speech has ceased to flow."

Those words, funneling not through the Pythia but through the sole remaining priest of Apollo tending the shrine, were its last words. Its thoughts, rather, that the priest of Apollo put into words.

The brain has receptor sites that attract opiates as the world has sites that draw pilgrims. These receptor sites are densest in the corpus striatum, the brain area that helps integrate motor activity and perceptual information. The gas from Alpha Phoenicis IV had bound invisible diffusions of itself to the brain tissue first of dolphin and then of human and, in place of the give and take of speech, had read and written images in the mind of dolphin and human.

Its time was at hand. Its time to withdraw from the limited and limiting minds. Its time to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

husband itself, to debride and groom itself, against the hour of leave-taking and the long day of journey home to its own rebirth.

And it had a not-too-pressing awareness of a deadline. The alloy of its spacecraft, sunk in the Aegean, had this property, that it soaked up radiation, stoking itself for the return trip. This good had its bad. Unless the vessel used the power and took off before the build-up reached the critical point, the alloy would explode, cracking the earth's crust.

But, with a reverse half life based on normal background radiation, that lay far enough ahead — in the mid-1990s — to allow a safe margin of meanwhile. The gas sponged itself into the aquifer beneath the shrine, hermetically sealed the cap rock, and settled down to await its moment in the mid-1980s. It had time. Lots

Unluckily, it had not foreseen an Einstein and had not allowed for the use and testing of nuclear weapons and the titanic jump in radiation, and suddenly here were the late 1970s ticking away.

1

"Know thyself." — Solon

"Four to thr —"

John DeFoe strangled the erotic whisper almost as soon as he touched it into speaking. On his belly on the wrong side of the bed, he had humped himself up and crawled to reach the voice stud of his travel clock. He yawned a tear-making yawn. A hell of an hour but reassuring all the same. He had reached out of limbo and caught hold again of the thread he followed. He was alive. It was now.

What had wakened him?

What had wakened him recurred: tank treads in the streets, military barks. Leaving the room dark, he padded to the window and edged the shade away. In the glow of high-intensity street lights tanks fretted the avenue. They hatched busts of soldiers, and here and there soldier atlantes stood in doorways.

John shrugged and was about to go back to bed when a long black car pulled up below in front of his hotel. Soldiers sprang to open the rear doors and saluted two men in civies who got out and made for the entrance.

For a moment his chill had nothing to do with the air conditioning. But then his shiver turned into another shrug. Secret police, yes, but whatever the KYP agents wanted in the Athens Hilton at this hour, it had nothing to do with him.

A light rapping at his door stopped him beside his bed. Again the chill. But it was too soon for the KYP agents to have reached his

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

floor and his room. The rapping came again, heavier and hastier.

"Yes?"

"Telegraphema." A hoarse boyish voice.

The word was a blow to the jaw. Wondering what more bad news the messenger could be bringing to anticlimax that of the past few days, he scooped up a few coins from the spill of his pockets on the night stand and cracked the door open. The door pushed him back, off balance.

"Apheste mou en." The voice was bell clear now; that had been Trojan hoarseness. She was all girl.

She shoved in, blind to his nakedness, and waved him backward with a small automatic. Two-inch barrel; that would make it a twenty-five. He backed slowly.

He had Greek from his childhood here, but he kept his face blank now and spoke in English.

"What is it? What do you want?"

"Ah, an American." It was recognition, not joy. "Why do you shore up the rotten junta with your Sixth Fleet?" Then, as though remembering there was a time to hector and a time to laconize, she looked around past him. "You are alone?"

"Not now."

She gave a grunt and a lift of her chin. His eyes widened, heightening her blondeness, as her loveliness came more into the light from the hall. She leaned back against the door. It clicked shut.

The room dimmed to the street glow filtering through the shade. He knew he made a fine silhouette; he stood still. She reached behind her with her free hand and turned the night latch. She reached out and switched on the light. Her face flooded with red. Her own eyes widened, fleetingly flecked with gold.

"Turn around."

He turned. The coins bit into his palm. Handy, if he was about to cross the Styx. His naked flank covered him as he worked a coin onto the thumbnail and touching the launching pad of his index finger and flipped it hard to his right. It hit the open bathroom door and bounced into tile and chrome. He heard the rustle of miniskirt and tights as the girl whirled to face the clatter. He turned.

The gun had swung away from him, not all the way but enough to justify jumping her. He grabbed the gun and the gun hand and twisted the one from the other. Not easy; she surprised him with her strength and she held tight while fighting back. But her trouble seemed to be that she had taken some karate lessons and was prone

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to pull her blows as in practice; this was likely the first real fight of her life. He hollowed himself to avoid the kicks and kneeings, got the gun away, and danced out of range as she was getting the hang of it.

She was quick to turn to terror and pity.

"I had to find a place to hide. They are after me for violating the curfew. They will beat me and torture me. They are beasts."

He grew tautly aware of the beast in himself. He hurried to switch off the light.

There was a shout in the street. He hurried back and edged the shade aside. A soldier standing in the roadway was pointing his window out, apparently to a head thrusting from a corridor window two or three floors below his floor.

"Too late. They spotted the light. They'll be here soon."

"Where can I go? What can I do?"

"You can stay here. You can go to bed with me."

In the dimness he saw her stiffen. For the millionth time he told himself, cool it, it isn't your skin, but if it is don't let whitey get under it. Still he was glad of the dimness.

There had to be a lot more to it than merely breaking the curfew: the gun showed she belonged to the underground. Likely she had been on her way to or from a meeting to plot some move against the junta, if not indeed on a sabotage job. He owed the bitch nothing. But he had heard tales of what went on within KYP walls, and he had no love for the junta.

"Look, Bonnie Parker, I'm only trying to help. If they find us in bed together, they may buy the story you've been here since before curfew rang tonight. What're the hours? One a.m. to five a.m.?"

She nodded, then apparently thinking he hadn't seen, spoke. "Yes."

"So I sneaked you in before one. Don't worry; I came — strike that, arrived — just this evening, and, what with jet lag and all, I'm not up to anything. So what do you say, *ochi* or okay?"

"Okay."

She was already stripping. He stuck the gun under the pillow and got into one side of the bed. She got in beside him and they pulled the covers up. She lay stiff and still but he felt a subliminal quiver. His or hers? Or theirs?

He heard the softness of heavy feet in the hall.

"Quick, what's your name?"

She hesitated only a beat. "Xenia Leandros."

"Mine's John DeFoe. Pleased to meet you, Xenia. Where *did* we meet? Could it have been on the airport bus around seven?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Another beat. "Yes." A smile in the dark. "Pleased to meet you, Yanni."

The footsteps ended. But there was no knock at the door. The KYP was going to take them by surprise. Key mated to lock interruptedly, then evidently a KYP man took over from the hotel manager's trembling hand. Whispers, then the door flung open and the light flashed on.

He sat up, raising a hand to shade his eyes. A hand struck his down. He stared stonily at the KYP man. The man's face showed forth the soulless gray of chains. It was the same face the world over: right or left, east or west, north or south. The face of the questioner who did not have to answer for what he did, the custodian unquizzed, the law enforcer who put himself above the law.

"What is this? What do you want?" He fixed on the hotel manager hanging back and hovering unhappily. "Who are these men? Why are they breaking in?"

Both KYP men turned their heads briefly and the manager vanished. One remained by the bed, hands in coat pockets, while the other closed the door and moved into and out of bathroom and closet. Then the two stood looking down at John and Xenia. Their expressions did not change, but the face of the first began to twitch, and the face of the other seemed to catch the twitch.

Cool it, John told himself. That made a million and one times. He kept his face smooth and his voice even.

"I take it you're from the police. I am an American citizen and my good friend is a Greek citizen. We have done nothing wrong. Do you mind telling me what this is all about?"

"Your papers, please."

John nodded to the heap on the night table. The man picked out John's passport. He opened it and scanned it, and any eyebrow lift damped the twitch. He reached for the phone, rang an outside number, and in Greek read the details off John's passport.

The name seemed to mean something at the other end. The man listened at attention, then spoke again, still in Greek.

"He is with a girl." The man listened, reddened, and asked for a moment. He turned to Xenia. "Your papers."

Xenia nodded to her shoulder bag on the chair. The other KYP man pawed through the bag and passed her I.D. to the one at the phone, who read it off. John nodded slightly to himself. So Xenia Leandros was a student actress. He shook his head slightly to himself. The man's reading of the word proved that in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

prurient puritanism of the Greek dictatorship actress equaled whore.

The KYP man listened, saluted vocally, and hung up. He replaced the passport and handed his partner the ID to put back.

"We go now. We are looking for someone. But I am to tell you, Kyrios Yanni, you will please to call at KYP headquarters at ten in the morning. Any taxi driver will know where."

As they turned to go, one nudged the other, and both KYP men studied the constellation of coins on the carpet. John became aware only now that he had dropped them while going for Xenia's gun.

The gazes of the KYP men lifted and met. They looked back at the outline of Xenia's form, glanced at John, and left.

John felt both relief and letdown that he and Xenia had not had to use their lie. It was good to have got away with it; yet it seemed they had got away with it too easily. Maybe not; he still had to pay a call on KYP headquarters. He had the feeling that his name had sidetracked the KYP men from their search for a girl violating curfew. He thought he knew why.

Xenia stirred. She sat up forgetfully topless and eyed him accusingly.

"What do they want to see you about?"

"What?" He had got lost in her topography. "Sorry, I wasn't listening."

She shook her hair back impatiently, bringing topology into play.

"KYP headquarters. Ten in the morning. Why? Who are you really?"

He aborted a grimace. He didn't want to talk about it, but he had to sooner or later. It might be well to go through it once before he went through it with the KYP.

"My guess is I'm the get of a black sailor off the aircraft carrier JFK and a Greek girl. All I know for sure is somebody dumped me in an orphan asylum in Piraeus right after the knot was tied: navel string, that is. When I was four an American couple adopted me. Andrew and Cora DeFoe. He's been back and forth a lot here. He's ... he *was* ... head of a computer software firm doing a job for DBC —"

"Delphi Bionomic Corporation? The Delphic Oracle project?"

"That's right. His latest and last job, though I didn't know about it till now: I was out of touch. We sort of lost track of each other."

"You fought?"

"Agreed to disagree is more like it. He was against my dropping out of the university. I've been bumming around trying to find

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

myself. Or lose myself. Or maybe just killing time."

"What doing?"

"Not much for bread, I have to admit. I tried to make it with a rock group, but it was too much of a damn mob scene."

"Obscene?"

"Mob, but as I say it petered out. Mostly I've been taking odd jobs, working just long enought to pay for scuba diving, sky diving, gliding. Anyway, that's not the point. What brings me here now is that both my foster parents died here in the past few days."

"Oh, no!"

"I don't like coincidences to begin with, and they died separately in ways that seem out of keeping with all I know of them. Could be this is where the KYP comes into it. It seems they know I'm the son. Maybe they have something to tell me, or maybe they think I have something to tell them."

Xenia put a hand of his arm, baring herself more.

"I am sorry for your loss."

He nodded. Her hand stayed on his arm while she looked away. He sensed that her mind raced. Wondering how to use him? His mind raced trying to catch up with his feelings. His body already knew how he wanted to use her. If this wasn't love at first sight, there was propinquity: like, man, in this world full of numbers doing their own numbers, it was the next best thing.

"Now what about you?"

Her hand left his arm as if his flesh burned hers.

"What about me?"

"You can't leave now till five at the earliest. Might as well make yourself comfortable."

He put his hand on her arm. She shook it off, baring herself yet more. He gazed at the Platonic shadows on the Plutonian shore. She did not pull the sheet back up. She slipped out of bed, reached quickly under the pillow, and backed away with the gun in her hand. He got slowly out of bed. She moved away. Her finger crooked around the trigger.

"Stay away."

He kept coming. Her finger tensed. He kept coming. She let the gun hand fall.

"Are you crazy? I could have killed you."

He took her in his arms and breathed into her ear.

"I put the safety on when I stuck the gun under the pillow."

She breathed into his ear.

"And I put the safety off when I took the gun from under the pillow."

Both reached out. Their fingers met on the light switch.

They awoke to the residue of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dawn. John muttered sleepily as Xenia shook his shoulder.

"I'm awake, I'm awake." But he kept the lids on.

Unready just yet to open his eyes to reality, he reached across Xenia's breast and touched the voice stud of his travel clock.

"Ten after nine."

"You see?" But the erotic whisper had put a laugh in her voice.

"See what?"

He felt her sit up, her shadow flickering across the translucence.

"The time. Aren't you going to get ready for your visit to the KYP?"

He shut-eyed her gravely.

"To help me get through the day, I've discovered a simple labor-saving device: loafing. Give us this day our daily loaf."

"Crazy. You do not brush away lightly a summons from the KYP."

He felt her turn from him in a fury at his stoicism or phlegm or apathy or however she thought of it. A rhythmic static followed. He opened his eyes. He watched her brush her hair. The motion tamed the fury, turned her dreamy.

When they had made love she had begun in a preoccupied way, then had concentrated fiercely. Thinking of it, he felt like smiling. It had been good, euphoric, to feel passion after forgetting it so long it seemed lost forever.

Even news of Andrew's death and Cora's had not broken his frozen mask. It was more than mask: it went more than skin deep. It was, to be paradoxical, a feeling of lack of feeling. This bit of self-discovery pleased him enormously. But the mask, though cracking, was still in place. If you made a skintight mask of the Mona Lisa's face and put it on, would you feel what the smile meant? He still did not know what his own mask meant.

Dreamily he watched Xenia brush dreamily. She had taken over his brush. The pig-male eon has passed, he thought, we're coming back to the mother-goddess. As if she had felt him stir, her body took on a thrust she likely thought sexy, and the brushing took on a more sensuous rhythm. But what turned him on was her naturalness. He took the brush from her hand and took over for a spell, then dropped the brush and cupped his hands on her breasts. She turned to face him.

"No, you will be late."

"Yes."

He pressed his mouth to a silent but mutinous mouth. Then the mouth smiled under his. Xenia pulled gently away, far enough to speak.

"Let us at least have some background in the meantime to remind you of the outside world

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which has such things as the KYP."

She pressed the bedside remote control, and the television set went into a song and dance, with a lively chorus line of bottles, about Loutraki mineral water. Xenia laughed at John's blank look.

"Okay, Yanni. We do not waste time."

They fell to.

They sat up. You know it's really serious when the network breaks in on a commercial.

And the serious face that filled the screen in place of the chorus bottles told them that in view of the false and malicious rumors that the government had postponed the opening-day ceremonies because of technical difficulties or, worse, because of student demonstrations, whereas the government had put the opening off out of respect for the designer's untimely tragic death, the Delphic Oracle would after all open on schedule. Premier Nikos Papadakis himself would open the reborn shrine today and give a speech worthy of the historic occasion.

John saw Xenia's mind turn over. Her eyes got him in focus.

"You understood what the man said?"

"Nai."

"Good. If Papadakis will be there, it means only invited guests will be there. I would like to watch."

"You can watch on television."

"I do not want to watch on television. I want to watch in Delphi. You are the son of the man who designed the new Delphic Oracle. You have the right and the duty to attend the opening and represent him. And you will take me."

"Even if I pass the screening, will you?"

"My family is very, very respectable. Has much *philotimo*, you know? We have a home in Psychico, not too far from the Papadakis home, though I have been rooming closer to the university. I will pass the screening. The KYP men read my name over the phone and did not take me in, and so they do not know I am ... anything but a bad woman of a good family."

"Say we do get to join the party. Of course we leave your gun behind."

Her eyes widened innocently. "Of course."

"If you work your way close to Papadakis and stab him with your nail file, his men will riddle you on the spot. You might think it's worth it. But they'd also riddle me. I don't know about the Leandroses, but enough DeFoes have died lately."

Xenia grew impatient, or put on a show of growing impatient.

"I promise I will not stab

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Papadakis with my nail file. Now if you do not hurry you will be late at the KYP headquarters."

"If I do hurry I may be late at the KYP headquarters."

"Excuse?"

"Never mind. I'll hurry. But first I'll touch base like Antaeus at the American embassy and leave word I'm going to KYP headquarters. Not that it means a damn. But I'd like it on record even if they later lose the record."

"Ah, *late*. I see *Thanatos*. But because you do not smile I do not see it is a joke."

"Yes. *Thanatos* is a big joke."

They dressed quickly, snatching at toast and coffee on the room service tray while they dressed. Xenia's skirt proved a maxiskirt.

"No, it did not grow overnight." She frowned as she smoothed its hang. "Does it look all right now? Miniskirts are against the Colonels' law. I pulled the skirt higher and held it so with the belt when I found myself caught on the streets by the curfew. I hoped they would think I was a tourist who did not know better. But they chased me anyway." She laughed. "All the same it helped. With the skirt high I ran like Atalanta."

In spite of his yes, his Greek was rusty. Xenia translated his Greek into Greek, and the taxi driver took them to the American embassy and waited while they went in. Xenia stayed in the lobby, and John looked for someone who would listen to him.

For him the labyrinth ended in the office of an F. Harry Stowe, who had uneasy eyes and laughed easily.

"You mustn't believe all they say about that place." He welcomed a change of subject. "Damned sorry about your father and mother, DeFoe. Of course we'll see what we can do to get you in the party, even on such short notice. Good publicity all around. You'll be showing you don't hold it against Greece that they happened to die here."

John found Xenia leafing fiercely through a copy of *Newsweek*. Before he could tell her how he had made out, she was thrusting it at him and showing that someone had razored out a story on the Greece of the Colonels.

"You see how they do not allow the truth here even on American soil. I spit on your American soil."

He got her out of there without her spitting.

He watched her disappear in the taxi after it dropped him off at the building on Bouboulinas Street. She was to get out a block past her true address, then walk back to her room, where she would change and wait for him. No car seemed to be tailing the taxi, but

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the KYP would need only the license plate. He felt sure eyes had noted it. The driver would tell the KYP where he had taken his fare. John turned to face the building, filled his lungs, and entered.

He printed his name on the back of the card of F. Harry Stowe's he had lifted. He handed it to the man at the desk at the door. S.O.P. to Cerberus. After a time another man led John to a room.

Major Stelios Anagnostis stood up behind his neat desk as John came in. Slick from hair to boot, the major shook a naughtying finger at John.

"Kyrios Yanni, you stopped at the American embassy. That was unnecessary. You must not believe all they say about this place. We do not torture anyone."

"I'm glad to hear that, Major. I'm always happy to meet a brave man."

"Brave?" The major recovered. "I hope I am brave, but why do you say that?"

"I have the theory that a torturer can't take one-tenth the dols he dishes out. So I'm glad you're not a cowardly torturer."

The major's eyes sliced John up and down and across, and his mouth ripped slowly open in a smile.

"An interesting theory."

"But that wasn't why I stopped at the American embassy, Major. I went there to pull strings to attend today's opening of the Delphic Oracle in my father's place."

The major's face grew grave.

"Sit down, please Kyrios Yanni. Concerning your father and also your mother. That is why you are here. Because of the unusual conjunction of deaths — for which I extend my heartfelt sympathy and that of the Greek government and the Greek people —"

"I thank you all."

The major bowed his head slightly.

"And because of the prominence of the persons, we, rather than the common police, looked into the circumstances. We undertook a most thorough investigation so that there will be no question of anything ... questionable."

"Thanks for your undertaking."

The major bowed his head again. "Only our duty."

"What can you tell me of their deaths?"

The major opened the top right drawer of his desk and pulled out a file folder. He spread the folder but spoke without reading.

"Kyrios Andrew went scuba diving off Mykonos in the afternoon of the tenth."

He eyed John's Adam's apple. John knew this to be an old interrogators' trick to gauge reaction. The apple of knowledge.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

John cupped a hand to his chin. The thinker. The major's Adam's apple bobbed.

"When he failed to return to his hotel that evening, a search began. But the body did not turn up till a week later. The post-mortem showed he died of an embolism. You know what this is, an embolism?"

John nodded.

Wrong, wrong, wrong. Lies, Lies, lies.

Andrew had taught him scuba diving and practiced what he preached. Andrew was a stickler for safety and would not have gone scuba diving alone. An embolism results when a diver ascends holding his breath. Death can come even in shallow water, and to avoid it, every diver must learn to exhale, automatically and instinctively, as he ascends. Andrew would not have ascended holding his breath.

"And my mother?"

The major's hands floated up in sorrow.

"She had ... a woman's indisposition and had not gone to Mykonos with the Kyrios Andrew. She remained at their hotel suite in Piraeus, and it was there, after a week of suspense, that the sad news reached her. Poor woman, the grief must have been too much for her. The Kyria Cora died of an overdose of sleeping pills."

This too rang wrong. Cora had been strong. She would have grieved, yes, but she would not have grieved herself to the grave. She would not have OD'd herself with sleeping pills. She had phoned him to tell him of Andrew's death and had sounded angry — at Fate? at what? not maudlin. She was a fighter, not a quitter. They had been cut off, and he could not get her back on the phone.

The major had closed the folder and was holding it ready to slip back into the drawer. The waiting attitude showed John that the major expected more of him than a thinking pose. The stoic and the spartan were all very well as ideals. But the real was drama. Even if the fact of bereavement moved John little, the role of the bereaved should move him to some dramatic show of emotion.

Not that the major would want him to make too much of it; but from the purely professional point of view, the innate suspiciousness of the police mind, the major wouldn't want him to make too little of it. The golden mean.

"I'd like to see the bodies."

This was not the golden mean.

"You would not like to see your father's. Eddies swept the body back and forth over sharp rocks. And, as the record of the inquest shows, it was in the water a week."

"I'd like to see the bodies."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The major's hands floated up in surrender.

"Very well, Kyrios Yanni."

The chill basement room grew chiller as the long drawers rolled out.

"I told you, Kyrios Yanni, you would not like to see your father's body."

John made himself look and hold the look. The major went on in an instructional tone, as to a medical student on a ward tour.

"You will note the fingers. The skin of the fingers shrank, and we had to inject fluid to puff them up enough to take prints from them. There is no doubt this is your father."

John nodded and turned to the other body. Someone had teased Cora's features almost gala. That was not the only obscenity. Cora had been proud of her long slender neck and would never have worn this high ugly collar unless she had made it into the vain eighties or nineties. He reached out and, before anyone could move, unbuttoned the high collar and spread its wings.

For a moment he thought he was wrong. But then he touched the skin of neck and shoulders, and his fingers lifted powder and grease, baring dark bruises.

The air grew even chiller. The major inched up on his toes, and the question of which way the major would go hung on its own hook in the meat-locker air. The major settled back on his heels. His hands floated up.

"I am sorry you had to see this, Kyrios Yanni. I would have spared you the pain, though I assure you the Kyria Cora felt none." He sighed. "Better she had." He raised a minatory finger as John's head lifted. "The chambermaid and another woman found her deep in a sleep of barbiturates. No doctor was at hand. They tried to bring her around by slapping her. We did not think it necessary to make this fact public. It would only have embarrassed those women, who were merely trying to help."

John nodded and turned away. The major motioned to the attendant, and the drawers rolled hollowly back into place. When they had returned to Major Anagnostis's office, the major filled two glasses with raki. The major's glass raised high.

"Ya sou!"

John could not bring himself to wish the major good health; he raised his glass. They drank, the flashing of glasses possibly accounting for the flashing of eyes. John hoped he hadn't betrayed that he wasn't swallowing the major's version of the deaths with his raki. But he knew he'd be on the major's shit list, whatever he showed or didn't show. The two of them set

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up bad vibes. The major hated young people who failed to fit the junta's mold. John didn't like the major or what the major stood for.

The major smiled. "I am almost forgetting. Soon I will be senile. There is a package of your father's gear. What he was wearing, you know. Perhaps you would like to take it with you. If not, we can always arrange to ship it wherever you wish. We have ... cleaned it."

"I understand. Thanks. I'll take it along."

"We have released your father's personal effects, which we found in his hotel room on Mykonos, to his lawyer."

"Who is?"

"You do not know? Ah, but then I am forgetting also that you and your father were estranged, is it not?" A spark of satisfaction. "The generation gap, as you Americans put it. The name of the lawyer is Kostis Dimitriou. He was also being an associate of your father's at Delphi Bionomic Corporation. You will no doubt find him there. Do you know him?"

"I know the name. He's the man who sent me the wire about the Kyria Cora's death."

"A good man. You will no doubt wish to ship the bodies back to the States for burial. He can handle that for you. Now to something more pleasant. You say you would like to attend the ceremonies later this afternoon at the shrine of the Delphic Oracle. You have come to the right man. I am in overall charge of security arrangements. I will fix it that you ride in the Premier's motorcade." The major's hands rubbed themselves. "How is that?"

"Great. Can I take a friend along?"

"A friend. That would be Xenia Leandros?"

"Yes."

"Do you know her well?"

"No."

"A wise answer to a foolish question. Even if we know others well, how well do we know them? That is my philosophy."

"A wise philosophy. And I thought Greece had lost its marbles."

The major froze, then thawed. "Ah, yes. I think I see. The Earl of Elgin. How well can others know Greece by stealing its antiquities away?" He tapped his temple. "We still have our marbles here."

"Right on."

The major looked at him long and hard. "Kyrios Yanni, I will tell you something. I believe I can trust you to keep it to yourself." The major moved nearer and lowered his voice. "I am not satisfied we have all the answers to your parents' deaths. I tell you this

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

because I have the feeling you are not fully satisfied either. The underground — criminal riffraff, students, idlers — has been trying to undermine the government in every dirty way. What better way than to use terrorist tactics against tourist attractions, of which the Delphic Oracle will certainly be one? Am I still right on?"

John waved him to go ahead.

"Very well, Kyrios Yanni. If — and I only say if — these deaths are unnatural, it would not surprise me to find the underground at the bottom. And here is a word of warning. I fear that your Xenia Leandros may be part of, or at least sympathetic toward, the underground. See her, by all means. Enjoy her beauty. But I would ask you to be mindful of this and to watch out that she does not lead you into danger."

Leaving the building, with the burden of scuba gear the major had laid on him, John had the feeling at the nape of his neck that the KYP disliked seeing anyone walk out free and whole. Though he would not let the KYP eidolon know it, he felt he was neither.

2

"Nothing too much." — Cleobulus

Word relayed back to John's taxi that students had taken to the streets up ahead. Like swells of sound from a playground, chants broke upon the stalled traffic. While jeep loads of police and a water cannon mounted on an armored vehicle moved in to deal with the demonstration, John killed time by unwrapping the package of scuba gear.

They had wrapped it in newspaper. The newsprint did not shrink in the lens as he lifted the face mask away. He held the face mask up and looked through it as he twisted and turned it. There was no distortion of the taxi driver's spherical head and world-weighted shoulders or the holy card taped to the sunshade or the ticking meter.

Andrew De Foe had been nearsighted and astigmatic but could not stand contact lenses. He had needed a prescription-ground lens in his face mask. This face mask had a plain lens, and it was plain it was not a replacement.

If this was not Andrew's gear, then the odds were that Andrew had never gone to Mykonos, that the KYP had held him a week and worked him over in their cells. What better way to hide the damage than by faking a diving accident and long immersion?

But why? What did Andrew have that they wanted to have or know that they wanted to know?

Could Andrew have had ties with the underground? No way. While Andrew might not have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

echoed the major in his roll call of its make-up — criminal riffraff, students, and idlers' — might indeed have admired the underground's ideals, Andrew was above all a realist.

But while Andrew went along with the establishment, give him that he would not bend ethics more than he had to. Had the junta asked too much of him? Did it have to do with his job?

A jolt told John that the way ahead was clear. In the now-empty square of the demonstration the gutters ran pink.

DBC headquarters filled a floor in the Stoa of Attalos in the Athenian agora. Varvara Tambouris filled a free-flowing dress. Her perfume breathed her presence to John. He turned from turning pages. She introduced herself. She was Kostis Dimitriou's secretary.

"Your parcel will be safe here. Please walk this way."

A Groucho Marxist straight line if he had ever heard one, and a sinfully sinuous walk.

In the DBC reception area there had been copies of the yearly report. For the color photo in the report, Andrew DeFoe, president and chairman of the board, stood pointing to a paper — map? chart? — on the table. He looked like a captain who ran a tight ship. All the officers wore the same black suit that he wore and all stood around him behind the table and looked unsmiling at his finger.

Kostis Dimitriou had changed from his image in the photo. He wore an electric blue suit, a lemon shirt, a blinding tie, and an equally blinding smile. Plump, with a soft clinging handshake, he spoke so liquidly that he had to stop every now and again to swallow. On greeting and seating John he remembered the occasion and a sorrowful pout swallowed the smile.

But the boots of business trod hard on the heels of sympathy.

"Do you know the terms of Kyrios Andrew's employment with DBC? There were generous stock options as an incentive — a capital-gains tax gimmick — to keep Andrew working for DBC. I am sorry to say death voids the options. But he did draw good salaries, from this as well as his own consulting firm, and I feel sure he and the Kyria Cora provided for you in their Stateside wills."

He switched the smile on again.

"How are things in the U.S.? Whenever the world wants a look-see at know-how it turns to the U.S. The U.S. is always in the lead. That is why DBC turned to your father. He was the best in his line, the best."

John turned to his memory of the coastline vanishing in haze, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

megalopolis ghosting away.

"Last I saw, the U.S. still leads the world in photochemical smog."

"But the people. When I say the U.S., I mean the people."

"There are no more people. The people have dissolved and Polaroid prints of them are walking around."

Kostis Dimitriou looked puzzled, then shone with delight.

"You are a chip off the old shoulder. Always Kyrios Andrew was making jokes with a straight face."

"How did he feel about the junta?"

Dimitriou's brow went greasy. The smile looked more like straining at stool.

"Andrew was above that. He was like a psychotherapist. The psychotherapist controls his face to keep the patient from knowing how he feels about the patient. He was here to do a job. He did not tell me: I do not know how he felt about things outside the job."

"How do you feel about the junta?"

"Po, po, po." A murmur of demure demurral. "I do not mix in politics. Do you know the fable? Once there was a Greek boy who wished his mother would die. 'My father,' he told himself, 'will quickly take a new wife, one young and beautiful, and I will sleep with her.' But it was not the boy's mother but his father who died. His mother quickly took a new husband, a Turk."

He leaned toward John and beckoned John to bend nearer. He whispered in John's ear.

"Some people say that's what's happened to Greece. Democracy died, and we got Fascism, not Communism. Communism, Fascism. When someone puts the boot to you, does it matter if it's the left boot or the right boot?"

He sat back and laughed a hearty laugh for the benefit of the walls.

"Some fable, eh? No, as I say, I do not mix in politics. What is, is. One must steer at least a little with the wind."

"But one knows where one's heading, doesn't one?"

"You are young, Kyrios Yanni. Maybe one thinks one knows, but often trivia decide which road we take. Every second, every nanosecond, is a meeting of ways, a parting of ways."

"Greek politics may change but one thing stays the same. Greece still rears philosophers."

"You're too kind." The shine of delight again. But the bulgy eyes searched John's face while the pudgy fingers — absently? nervously? — tapped a large clasp-type envelope resting on the desk. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"I understand you have some of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my father's personal effects."

Dimitriou discovered the envelope.

"Thank you for reminding me."

He opened the envelope and poured out a signet of pens, a pocket calculator, a mini-cassette player with a cassette of Debussy's songs, eyeglasses, and a wallet. The wallet gave birth to driver's license, credit cards, membership cards, ID card with blood type, several hundred dollars in U.S. and Greek currency, snapshots of Cora and John together and of Cora and John separately, and a folded piece of paper.

The piece of paper proved to be a page covering a week from a dated memo pad. The days ran from the seventh of the month to the thirteenth, but the entries reached only to the tenth.

The seventh's entry read: *Buy Johnny an underwater watch for his birthday and send as from Cora.* John looked away. He had always felt that Cora was the one who had wanted him. That Andrew had never been able to voice his deepest feelings hadn't helped.

"There is no watch for you, I am sorry to say. They had no time."

John nodded and looked back at the memo page. None of the other entries held his interest. They merely listed, for tax purposes, how much Andrew had spent on taxis and such. What held his interest was the lack of mention of the jaunt to Mykonos. Why were Major Anagnostis and Kostis Dimitriou allowing him to see this buff page though it stripped away the color of the official story?

Thoughtfully, John began to refold the paper. Dimitriou forestalled him with a forefinger that nailed an entry on the ninth.

"What would this EOJ mean?"

The entry read: *EOJ, thank God!*

John watched Dimitriou's Adam's apple. "'End of job.'"

What did the sour gulp signify? That Dimitriou had found more good in the tantalizing than in the satisfying of his curiosity?

"Ah, yes. Having finished his labors, Kyrios Andrew would have been in the mood to unbend, to rest on his oars. Too bad he is not with us on this glorious day." The Adam's apple gave John foreknowledge. "Did your father say anything to you about his work?"

"You'll have to clue me in on that. He worked on many things. He had his own data-processing and consulting firm and was heading up — or figureheading up, you'd know better —" John waved around at the four walls "—DBC."

Kostis Dimitriou seemed to be working hard at seeming casual

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and pleasant. Was he playing the good guy, as against Major Anagnostis's bad guy?

"Did he say anything to you about the Delphic Oracle?"

"I knew he was working on it."

"But did not he mention a word? A word that, maybe without his realizing it, or your realizing it at the time, would tell you how in his mind he personified the DBC computer?"

It was John's turn to work hard. He fought to stay impassive. Now he knew why they had killed Andrew and Cora. Now he knew what they needed.

Andrew DeFoe had made the feasibility study, then supervised the project control system. John knew enough to know that design is a cyclical process — refining designs and making sure the inputs, outputs, and files are compatible — the catches the systems analyst up in its feedback rhythms. Andrew would have come to identify with the DBC computer. It would be an impossible task for John, or for anyone, to step into Andrew's shoes, into Andrew's skin. All John knew was that Andrew for some reason — mistrust of the junta? mistrust of the DBC board? — had chosen to keep to himself a key word or phrase giving him sole control of the computer.

That was why they had tortured Andrew to death. And Cora too had paid for Andrew's stubborn silence. Had they thought or hoped Cora knew or guessed the word they wanted and needed?

John turned a shiver into a shrug.

"The only word he mentioned about the DBC computer ... and I had this at second hand from Cora when he was halfway into his work on it ... was 'Whew!'"

"'Whew!'" Dimitriou remained leaning forward, trying to get the right inflection, memorizing it. "'Whew!'"

"That's right."

He rubbed the soft clinging afterfeel of Dimitriou's handshake from his hand as Varvara Tambouris walked him out. He felt no surprise and showed none when his parcel proved missing.

A gleam of what? — mischief, malice, mockery? — escaped the screen of lashes as she lowered her head and told him.

"It is terribly embarrassing. But if it fails to turn up, I am sure DBC will make good."

"I'm sure."

It could have been a sneak thief. More likely, belated realization had given Major Anagnostis to second-think about releasing the face mask with its plain glass lens to someone in the know.

He looked at Varvara. She was waiting for his look. She smelled

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

almost as nice as Kostis Dimitriou.

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to tell me a good place to eat."

"It is my lunch hour too. I will show you where I eat."

The taverna in the Plaka knew her well, and so there was no trouble, though much fuss, about finding them the best table for two. *Ouzo* got the juices going, and they began with *taramosalata,* followed with *soupa avgolemono,* then *moussaka,* washing them down with Samos wine, and for dessert they had *melachrino* and black *kafe.* Someone had primed her, and John helped prime her on the wine, to pump him. She handled it well.

Did he have any friends in Greece?

No.

No one to turn to in this sad hour for him? Had his father never spoken to him of having a good friend here, a confidant?

No. Did she like her work?

Yes.

Did she find Dimitriou easy to work for?

Yes. (A wrinkle of the nose.) Better than Dimitriou thought. (A stifling of laughter.)

Would she let him in on the joke?

Could he keep a secret? If a boss tended to grow cranky as the day wore on, what harm did it do if the secretary slipped him a tranquilizer in his coffee-break coffee?

None.

Exactly. But why the interest in Dimitriou? Had Dimitriou said anything ... strange?

Not said. Merely that Dimitriou had looked a far laugh from the grave likeness in the yearly report.

That was a thing to blame on the occasion and on the presence — the charisma — of Andrew DeFoe. All who knew him had so much awe and respect for Andrew DeFoe. They would all miss him very much. His death had come as a great shock. And the lady Cora's.

Had she known him well?

As well as a small worker ever knows the big, big boss. And this big boss had spent most of his time in the field, at Delphi with the computer installation, hardly any time in the office. As he should know, Andrew DeFoe had worked mostly on his own.

Had she known Cora?

There had been just one meeting — the first and the last alas — when she had brought the condolences of the DBC staff to John's mother, only to find the lady Cora dying. She had tried —

John looked at Varvara's graceful hands and asked silent questions. Had those hands tried to slap and beat knowledge of Andrew's key to the computer out

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Cora? Had those hands slipped Cora the final tranquilizer?

— but it had been too late to save the lady Cora.

It was too early to answer another silent question, but he asked it of himself as he waved back to Varvara just before DBC headquarters swallowed her. Who was Varvara really working for? The KYP? Or a person or persons plotting a takeover of DBC?

From lovely Scylla to lovely Charybdis. Who was Xenia really working for? The underground? Or the KYP? Major Anagnostis had warned him about her, but that warning could be a dodge. Why, out of all the hotel rooms, had she chosen 423?

The Hilton's desk clerk handed him an envelope. The governmental embossing gave the envelope such weight in the clerk's eyes that it took him two hands to convey it to John. It held an engraved invitation to attend today's opening and a note informing him when a car would pick him and his companion up.

Delphi. Already he felt the pull of the place.

3

"Give bond and go broke."

— Thales

As magnetic sand arranges itself on a piece of paper, outlining the force field of a magnet, so the motorcade took shape. The long line of Mercedes limousines, with the vanguard and rearguard of bristling jeeps and of armed cyclists whose crash helmets and glare shields and leather jackets and boots made them seem robots, moved out on schedule from the assembly point.

John settled back beside Xenia. The air conditioning shut out almost completely the dry heat and the city sounds and smells. But the colors of the Greek flag — blue sky and white buildings — came through. Greece was home and yet not home. The U.S. was home and yet not home. Home was where you hung your hat, and he had no hat.

He had changed into something soberer or at least matching. He had looked long at long strands of gold in his brush. Then the desk rang him with word of Xenia's coming and waiting, and he had hurried down, skipping the elevator. She had done herself and him proud.

They hadn't met Colonel Nikos Papadakis or even seen him. They couldn't tell which limousine held the Premier. Polarized glass darkened the outside of all motorcade windows. No doubt they would meet the Premier once they reached Delphi. If Xenia planned to stab or shoot the man, John could not see where she might be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hiding the wherewithal. Not in that form-fitting getup.

For some reason, theirs was the lead limousine. Though dark glass hid him, John felt naked. He would have felt more at ease in an open car with Xenia, her green scarf free to make oscilloscope squiggles in the wind.

"What are you thinking, Yanni?"

"Wondering what the setup's like at the shrine. Have you heard anything about it?"

Schoolkids lined the route out of Athens, waving flags dutifully. Xenia waved back, as if forgetting they could not see her. Or was she simply putting off answering his question? He caught her hand and held it.

"Well?"

She gave him warm pressure. "I have heard there is something strange going on at the shrine."

"What?"

She pressed her lips tight and nodded at the chauffeur. John nodded at the glass partition. She picked an invisible bug from John's ear and squashed it.

"Is that nice? All right, then, Xenia, speak in riddles."

Her hand tightened his. "I will." She looked far away into the blue sky and then came back to him. "What do you know of the Delphic Oracle — the original one?"

"I read somewhere how come it panned out so well. The priests of the shrine had their spies and informants all over the Mediterranean basin. They took in all the dirty linen: data, or gossip, about who were the failing men, who were the coming men, who was plotting war, who would sell out his city-state for a price, who was screwing whom; and about the short- and long-range weather and political outlook — where crops would be good or bad and where there would be unrest or stability. With that input they could give shrewd advice.

"Besides, the percentage was with the house. Everyone *expected* the Oracle's answers to be somewhat ambiguous. Good psychology, too. It forced the suppliant to look into himself and to use his free will and to blame himself if things went wrong: he just had not taken it right. Right?"

"And the modern Delphic Oracle?"

"I imagine the computer will work along the same lines, only handling many more suppliants in much less time."

Xenia rested her head on his shoulder. At first he thought it was to cuddle in admiration, but it was to whisper.

"But if the computer isn't working?"

He patted her ambiguous head.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But it is working. It has to be working. This is its opening day. Papadakis is going to cut the ribbon or the umbilical cord or something."

Still, his stomach knotted. Was Xenia confirming that the computer was stillborn or retarded without Andrew's key? She could have come by that information from either the underground or the KYP, whichever she really served. But if so, why this motorcade charade?

But Xenia had him wondering. Was she with Anagnostis and/or Dimitriou in hunting Andrew's key to the computer? Or was she with the underground in planning to destroy the computer? It had to be one or the other.

"What about your riddle?"

He shook her a little to get her going. She looked suddenly afraid or uncertain, then she sighed.

"Can the blind lead the blind?"

"Is that the riddle or are you getting personal? If it's the riddle, I give up. You'll have to spell it out."

She made a face. "There's talk about a girl — a local girl from the village of Arachova just below Delphi — they say she is crazy and stupid and yet bright in some ways..."

"An idiot savant."

"The other day a man from DBC bought her from her parents —"

"Bought?"

"What do you call it when someone gives poor people a lot of money and takes their daughter away?"

"Bought."

"And the rumor is that this girl — or woman; she must be my age — is to play the part of the Pythia."

John looked out. The road had taken a turn for the worse. They were in the hills now, mounting toward Parnassus.

Could an idiot savant, with a radio receiver in her ear linking her to a retarded computer, lightning-conduct masses of data on a series of questions and come right back with a series of answers that appeared to foretell? It just might work well enough and long enough to fool the public and buy Dimitriou, et al., time to find the key and get the computer fully on line.

The key. Now there was a challenge. It struck him that he had never given thought to how Andrew's mind worked. He had always found it enough that Andrew's mind was a formidable one. Any key Andrew picked would not be the obvious — unless, as in Poe's "Purlioned Letter," it was the excessively obvious.

A word, a combination of letters. EOJ? Forget it. *EOJ, thank God!* had been merely a heightened

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thank God It's Friday. Dimitriou would have tried EOJ and JOE and DBC and CBD on the computer and would have found them wanting. For John DeFoe to have any hope of digging what the KYP and the DBC brainstormers had so far failed to unearth, the key would have to fit in with something personal that only someone close to Andrew knew about him. And now he felt the distance they had allowed to grow between them.

"What are you staring at, Yanni?"

He hadn't realized he was staring at anything. But it jumped into awareness that he was staring at the rearview mirror. Something subliminal had drawn his gaze.

The pattern had changed. One particle had moved out of place in the magnetic-sand gestalt of the motorcade force field. John hadn't counted the cyclists at the outset, but the symmetry seemed not to have altered aside from this out-of-place particle. That meant an extra cyclist had slipped in among his look-alikes at some bend or squeeze of the road and was now moving up along the motorcade, overtaking limousine after limousine.

His fellow motorcyclists apparently took him for one of their own bearing a message for someone up the line — though surely the rearguard kept in touch with the vanguard by radio. Maybe they were doing just that, for it seemed to John they were taking alarm, though too late.

"I'm staring at that."

Xenia twisted to look back. "I do not see ..."

The motorcyclist, coming up on John's side of the limousine, was already too near for her to see him. The road, living up to the serpentine arrow warning of curves ahead, brought the past and the future abreast of the present, and John watched two of the drag riders spurt to catch up with the maverick and a pair of point men slow to fall back.

John saw that the others would not reach the man in time to stop him from doing whatever he meant to do: like, man, he meant to do it now. The man reached inside his leather jacket. Not a gun, then; he had one at his belt. The cars were bulletproof, and that likely went for the tires too. The man's gloved hand came out with a grenade.

The tires would not be grenade proof. A blowout at this speed on a hairpin turn on their fright wig of mountain ...

The cyclist raised the glare shield of his crash helmet to pull the pin of the grenade with his teeth. John looked at the smileless smile and saw death.

John rapped rapidly on the glass partition. The chauffeur,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

eyes front, pointed ahead and shrugged: the escort was setting the pace. John found the button that lowered the partition. The chauffeur looked backward and inward, away from the motorcyclist. He was one of the stolid impervious ones; uppers or downers, exciters or numbers, nothing but death would alter his metabolism. By the time he caught on, it would all be over. Xenia put her hand on John's arm.

"What's wrong, Yanni?"

John pulled free and upped the door safety lock and pushed the door opener. Vaguely he was aware of an "Oh!" telling him Xenia had seen what was wrong. John's shove and the wind of passage swung the door out with a force that sprang the hinges.

Its arc would have missed the cyclist. But he shied at the sudden mass flying in his face, lost control as he twisted away one-handed; and the cycle sideslipped, skidded, and tilted. It threw him, his jaw still clenching the pin-pull like a teething ring, and he lit hard, out.

The grenade rolled from his hand, rocked, lay still. John motioned the chauffeur to keep going and pulled Xenia to the floor. The stillness ended, the car rocked.

John and Xenia sat up. Looking back down the streaming road, John saw that the other cyclists who had been closing in on the man had veered away in time to escape the worst of the blast and were recovering from their own skids.

For fear of ambush the motorcade did not stop at this spot. A kilometer further along, it halted long enough for Major Anagnostis, in the lead jeep, to walk back and make sure Mr. DeFoe and Miss Leandros had suffered no harm.

John watched the chauffeur wrench the door shut. The chauffeur eyed John as he did so, and the groaning sound seemed to come from his heart. He was not all that stolid and impervious after all. Though what moved him, the damage or his nearness to dying ... John reassured the major, then asked after the Premier. Papadakis, talk had it, cowered at a backfire.

"I hope the attack didn't shake Col. Papadakis up?"

"Oh, no."

"Brave man."

"Yes. He is also already at Delphi. He went by chopper."

4

"Consider the end." — Chilon

They had made Col. Papadakis up for television coverage of the opening. The pancake hid any pallor that might have come with news of the attack. His bodyguards

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

kept his distance. He merely nodded to the honored guests as they left the limousines and lined up protocolwise and climbed the winding Sacred Way to where he waited at the temple of Apollo.

John and Xenia, at the tail of the line, found themselves near a monitor and watched the television camera pan across the blessing hands of the thousand-foot cliffs above the shelf that Delphi stood on, lift to the snowy climax of Parnassus, catch an eagle riding thermals, come back down to earth and a quivering indiscreteness of almond blossoms, zoom through the pine-lined Sacred Way, then sheer off for the two-thousand-foot drop to the blue-gray shimmer of a million olive trees stippling the valley and washing up on the far-seen sea.

John breathed deep, taking it all in. That had been heavy, the assassination try: real heavy. Major Anagnostis had told them he thought that when the police policed up enough of the man to identify he'd prove out a student or other troublemaker. John had nodded but had thought that did not rule out a KYP provocateur's having fingered their car as the tyrant's.

A neat way to give the junta fewer malcontents to deal with and more reason to deal harshly with those remaining. It hadn't worked out, thanks to himself. At least not all the way. He and Xenia were alive. But the junta had half of what it wanted, another attempt that Papadakis had miraculously survived.

He turned to Xenia. She had hooded herself in her green scarf against the breeze. She had hooded her eyes as well; they seemed to focus on an inner outlook. Had the attempt shown her that she was expendable? In whose eyes, the KYP's or the underground's?

Maybe his question of the Pythia ought to be, *Whose side is she on?* They would all be asking the Pythia questions. The purpose of this happening was to show the people the Delphic Oracle was back in business.

He eyed his fellow pilgrims. Not counting the television crew or the security men, about two hundred were on hand: top diplomats, government officials, multinational businessmen, jet setters. He spotted Kostis Dimitriou, Varvara Tambouris, and faces from the pages of tabloids and slicks, the most famous being those of the billionaire transportation tycoon Viron Kontos and his dazzling young fourth or fifth wife Evridiki. He saw also a black cardinal who stood near Kontos and looked everywhere but at Kontos.

"An awkward moment." Major Anagnostis's voice in John's ear,

LICENSED TO MIT.EDU
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enjoying. "Because he has ties to Greece, the black cardinal is representing the Vatican here to show the Holy See does not fear this may signal the revival of paganism. When the cardinal was young his father was ambassador to Athens from Mali. There was something about the cardinal's younger sister Dalili and Viron Kontos. Some say Kontos seduced her so he could get a look at secret figures that gave him the edge in bidding on an oil deal with Mali. That was the beginning of Kontos' fortune, if you believe what they say."

"And Dalili's misfortune?"

John felt a shrug, or perhaps a nudge.

"Who knows what becomes of foolish little girls?" The major's eyes slid toward Xenia. "Her family secluded her, then bundled her off home to Mali. For all I know, she is fat as a jungle drum and happy. Ah, but I see the sound man is looking at me hard for whispering. I had better behave myself."

Major Anagnostis faded away, but in doing so he turned his KYP insignia toward the sound man. The sound man quickly looked at him soft and reseated his earphones and fiddled with the gain. John watched the man busy himself picking up some further distraction in the hush that fell as an announcer stepped up to the mike that stood on the temple floor beside Col. Papadakis. This time, though, before following through, the sound man made surer of his prey; he looked vindictively relieved to find the apparent culprit a member of the crew itself.

Obviously the boom man, he slouched alongside his presently inactive boom. His hands behind his back unconsciously worked a string of worry beads. And now that John followed the sound man's gaze and strained to listen, he too heard a *clickclickclickclickclick.*

The sound man moved to the boom man's side and gave him a shove and a word. The boom man stiffened into stillness. The *clickclickclickclickclick* kept on. John caught on almost as soon as the sound man. Crickets. The sound man's eyes and hands gave up.

The announcer enunciated about the occasion and about the honor the country and the world would now have to hear from the Premier himself. Papadakis greeted his guests, made a Freudian slip or Omphale's lion skin about the Greek fatherland having suckled such Greek concepts as democracy, philosophy, and drama, and went on from there, but John tuned him out.

John's eyes idled on the worry beads. He made them out twenty-two. Odd. He counted again

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to make sure. The same. *Komboloi.* whether of plastic, rock crystal, wood, or amber, were always of an odd number, commonly 17 or 39. Another odd thing about these beads too: lacking in satisfying loudness, they were. What stuff were they that they had moved so silently under cover of the crickets?

Soundlessness took much of the fun out of worry beads. The punctuating click of incisive thought ... the slow steady click of daydreaming ... the clickety-click of anger or frustration ...

Papadakis had finished. It wasn't even Greek to John what Papadakis had said. After holding on Papadakis taking sustained applause, the camera followed Papadakis down into the sanctuary.

It was all right to talk now, but Xenia remained lost in herself. John took her hand. It felt cold.

"What are you going to ask the Pythia?"

She shook her head, bringing herself back into real time.

"I won't know till I get there. How about you?"

"I don't know either. I'm trying to find out what it is I want to find out."

He saw Papadakis on the monitor enter the sanctuary and speak to the Pythia. He moved Xenia and himself nearer the monitor to see if he could pick up sound. There was none. Maybe it was because questions and answers were to be private; the petitioner's problem and the Pythia's prophecy would be confidential. This that took place now, though, was only a demonstration. So maybe the sound was off out of fear of a fluff on the part of either Papadakis or the Pythia.

John made out the veiled and smoke-wreathed figure of a woman, a girl. She sat cross-legged on a high three-legged stool. In thinnings of the smoke the golden statue of Apollo stood out. And that egg-shaped stone would be the Omphalos, the world's belly button. The Pythia sat trancelike a moment after Papadakis spoke. For that moment the medium herself was the message. Then she spoke. Papadakis nodded puzzledly and left.

He emerged in person and waved, and shortly his chopper whirred him away.

Now it was the turn of the rest. They began moving slowly up the ramp leading to the temple floor. DBC had patched the great marble paving blocks, added missing columns, and restored the roof. There was much new surface for some of the honored guests covertly to gratify the graffiti itch.

John watched the black cardinal — the name Idi Naluji surfaced out of remembered reading — glance

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at his wrist watch and frown as at a conflict of interests. Time versus eternity? The black cardinal was in the first lot, together with several ambassadors and the Kontoses; Evridiki walked behind Viron. The cardinal's hands hung loose transversely so that his palms flashed palely back with the swing of his arms and his ring finger flashed back a gold joint.

Much would rest in the carindal's hands, hang on how he gauged the Oracle. Could be the Vatican was still on the verge of putting out a minatory bull on the Delphic Oracle. After all, hadn't the Index fingered the works of Pausanias, Hesiod, and the others who cited the Oracle? But, on the other hand, Christianity had taken over pagan rites and festivals — take Easter and Yule — so could be the Vatican hoped to Christianize the Oracle.

There he went, down into the pagan shrine, the first black pope, as some said?

The announcer signed off, the monitor went blank, and the television crew began packing up.

Cardinal Naluji's lot came out blinking or dark-glassing into the late sun. The queue turned tacit as the cardinal stopped in front of John and worked the ring off his finger and held it out to John.

John tried to keep from starting and hoped his eyes were flat, unreadable. He did not reach out to take the ring, or make to kiss it, whichever the man had in mind for him to do. He caught Viron Kontos eyeing them.

The cardinal took hold of John's hand and lifted it palm upward. John felt pressure before he felt weight. He stared at the stunning gold-clenched stone in his palm. The ring burned his flesh with more than the heat of the cardinal's body or of the dying day.

"I can't take this."

"You must." The cardinal's voice had passed through a raw throat. The cardinal's red hat looked somewhat awry, himself somewhat unhinged. "The Pythia told me, 'Your most holy nothingness belongs to the first black man you see on leaving this shrine.' When I saw those mad eyes on me and heard that mad voice, I knew I had come face to face with something beyond reason, more than reason, and I follow its words by giving you this ring. What does a ring symbolize but that Nothingness which is All? To me it is clear: by this, the Delphic Oracle means to convey a lesson in humility, as when the pope washes the feet of the poor."

"If you put it that way..."

"May it bring you blessings."

"Thank you, Father."

"Not 'Father'; I am an Eminence."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Sorry, Your Eminence."

"Thank *you*, my son."

With bowed red hat the legate *a latere* made for his limousine. Slowly, because he wanted to do so quickly, John pocketed the ring. He slid his eyes at Xenia. She gave him a serious nod; then a secret smile came into play. Stonily, John faced the onlookers and vagued them away in his sight.

He wondered what the cardinal would say to the pope and what the pope would say to the cardinal. *On the word of a pagan you gave your sacred ring to a stranger? Holy Father, you had to be there.*

The world sharpened, and John found that he and Xenia were nearly there. No more portents had lightened the wait. But the line moved smoothly, the Pythia processing each lot in a minute or less, and now the peristalsis brought John and Xenia, he last and alone, down granite steps and into a corridor under the temple floor.

A flashing neon arrow pulsed its flight along the wall — the arrow of time retracing itself again and again, unaware that motion was impossible — guiding them to the inner shrine.

The veiled and smoke-wreathed figure of the girl, cross-legged on the tripod, seemed already weary with answering. John had a sense of eyes that rubbed salt in their own wounds. She spoke in Greek, in a tone that echoed prompting.

"Your name?"

John looked at Xenia. Xenia shook her head, her eyes remaining fixed on the Pythia in a strange devouring way.

"John DeFoe."

"Your question?" Again the echo of prompting.

In her ear would be a tiny receiver linking her to data banks and to a simple dialogue routine. Behind one of these walls would be the computer, retarded or mute without Andrew DeFoe's key word or phrase to spark intelligence or oil eloquence. The possibility existed, in the fantastic realm of reality, that an idiot savant might make connections no computer could, as a skilled abacist can outmath a man operating a machine calculator. But in the long run this expedient could not hope to match Andrew DeFoe's science. Though that was not to gainsay the immediate effect. Look at the way Cardinal Naluji had fallen for this speaking in tongues.

Shake them up a bit.

"Who killed my father?"

The floor trembled. Particles of rock dust and flakes of whitewash loosened and sifted down to join the smoke in filling the room. Man, that was an explosion, and right at hand, out in the corridor. Bad timing, if they were still after

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Papadakis. John turned his head toward the doorway.

The boom man entered the room. Sweaty, dusty, grinning fiercely around the cigar he was smoking, he strode past them to the far wall, where John now made out the hairline outline of a stone door. If that door was stone all the way thrugh, it would take massive counterweighting or power to slide it open. The man carried his worry beads; the string of beads seemed half its former length.

While John pondered that and wondered what the man was doing down here, the man softened the beads in his hands and squeezed them together and worked the mass into and athwart the hairline crack at one spot. John heard shouting and running. The Pythia sat arching backward in trance, as though her prompting had cut off. The cigar glowed in the smoky room. The man touched the tip to the string dangling from the molded beads.

Plastic explosive. Even before the man dove for cover, John pulled Xenia down behind the base of Apollo's statue and shouted at the Pythia to move. The Pythia sat arching backward in trance. He shouted again in Greek. The Pythia remained on her tripod. The world blew inside out.

5

"Know thine opportunity."
— Pittacus

He touched the knot on his head tenderly and winced. Had the boom man knocked him out. It seemed to him that his blackout had come moments after the blast, not with it. There was one touch of satisfaction. If the man was after the DBC computer and the DBC computer was behind the stone door, the man had failed to move the door an inch.

The Pythia sat on her tripod, arching backward in trance. Dust filmed her veil, but the sense of eyes that rubbed salt in their own wounds came through. The poor wise idiot.

Xenia lay twisted and still at Apollo's feet.

Xenia. He knelt beside the body.

No. A fold of the bloody green scarf mercifully covered the ruined face. No. He palped the wrist. No. Xenia lived and breathed a short moment ago. No.

He sank back down. A soundless hiss of steamless gas rose out of the earth. He saw that the blast had cleft the granite floor. The gas breathed itself into his nose and mouth. He thought the Delphic Oracle spoke to him, but there were no words in the air. He blacked out again.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Major Anagnostis was shaking him roughly.

"Come out of it. Did you see who it was?"

John stared, and the image of the boom man took hologram shape in the space before him. It surprised him that the major seemed not to see it.

"No."

The shape faded. Then the thought of Xenia formed into Xenia standing before him and eyeing him sadly, and he wanted to take that no back and say yes. But Xenia would not have liked him to do that. To betray the boom man to the junta would be to sentence her to have died for nothing.

"Did the girl herself do it?"

Panic hit him. He moved away from the major and toward the doorway. His sudden panic had nothing to do with Xenia. Or with the major. Or even with himself.

The radiation level.

Madness. The only fallout was the weak acrid odor of plastic explosive, and that had already thinned to a rare ping on the mucous membrane. Still panic rode him like the Old Man of the Sea.

Radiation. Radiation.

And now the greater madness was that he felt himself to be running not from the danger of radiation but toward it.

The major grabbed his arm.

"Where do you think you are going?"

Melas leukos, leukos melas, The third day hence to deep-soiled Phthia shalt thou go, and there thou shalt return to thy mother.

The words were not in the air, they were in his mind. The major had not heard them. The Pythia had not heard them, much less said them. The Delphic Oracle spoke to his hearing alone, to his inner hearing. Madness?

Radiation.

The major's grip on his arm tightened. Panic. He had to break free. His other fist swung and connected. The major's mouth opened in bloody surprise, and the major fell, tugging at the flap of his holster.

And John found himself in the corridor, crawling and scrabbling through the rubble of the first blast, then climbing and stumbling up into daylight. He ran across the temple floor and down the ramp to the edge of the road. The security men had hurried the guests down the Sacred Way and into the limousines and were starting the motorcade away.

He heard the major coming after him, but the panic stilled momentarily as something inside him stopped him to orient itself, using him as compass. It was getting on toward dusk, but he made a good target, or the major

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had good vision and was a good shot.

The slug hammered his left shoulder and spun him around, and he pitched down a slope. He landed heavily and the hurt knifed past shock. Panic picked him up, and he ran plunging further down into the darkness of tree and rock. More shots followed but now the major had lost him.

He felt every step pump more blood from him. He wanted to stop to catch breath and see to his wound, but panic would not let him. On the run he tore cloth from his shirt to plug the wound. Man, this was so heavy it was making him light-headed, making him float away from himself. Even when he had gone beyond endurance, his body ran on.

He came to himself flat on his back on the earth with his eyes open scanning the sky. It was not he who had been considering the shift in the shapes of the constellations. He did not know how he knew that the scanner was some Old Man of the Sea clinging to the corpus striatum in his brain.

A thick sticky film of sweat had congealed on him. He shivered as the night wind swept low. His wound. The cloth plugs had fallen away. He moved gingerly to touch the wound but felt only the ghost of pain. The wound had healed. There was no bullet hole. A lot of dried blood lay caked around where the bullet had gone through, but now there was no sign of its going in or out. Maybe the Old Man of the Sea had come around to the notion of looking after his mount.

Then panic seized him again, and he was on his feet and running fast, though stiff, covering ground downhill in jumpy strides. The next he knew he stood looking along a street at one lit house in a huddle of dark houses. The next he knew again he leaned against the jamb and stared in.

Sweat stung his eyes so that what he saw he saw blurrily. He saw three women at work in a wooly circle of light. One woman sat at a spinning wheel, another stood elbow-winding a length of yarn, and the third woman turned and the blades of her scissors pointed at him.

Trying to think solid ground in the middle of a mindquake, he seemed to himself to have stepped into another world and another time. Then he saw on the walls a show of rugs and shoulder bags and knew it was now and this was Arachova, the weavers' village downslope of Delphi. The one at the wheel spoke.

"Mazotheke to koubar' tou."

He wanted to speak in answer. *I'm not a goner.* Or in question.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Am I? But his tongue was too swollen and dry. The stone faces turned his face to stone, but they must have read something in his eyes. They gave him a heel of bread, a slice of feta, and a half bottle of retsina and pushed him away without touching him.

"Go."

He went.

His panic begrudged him the time to eat and drink. He sat down stubbornly on a small bridge near a wye in the road and ate and drank while the Old Man of the Sea muttered in his brain. When he finished, he filled the empty bottle with water from the stream. Then he ran through the night, and his panic made him make up the time.

Dawn struck the tip of Parnassus aglow as he slid down the last crumbling slope. The roads funneled him to the sea. The sun was in hot pursuit. The limbs of the trees swept up a cool breeze full of sweet grass, but he could not stop to rest in the soothing shade. This panic that was not his own and that, because it was not his own, touched off one that was his own drove him ruthlessly.

He kept looking for something along the way to help him understand where he was going. Maybe when he got where he was going, he would understand why he was where he was now. Enigma: puzzle. *The second day hence to deep-soiled Phthia shalt thou go, and there thou shalt return to thy mother.* The Oracle had said *third* day, but that was yesterday.

Black white, white black was easy enough. As with the riddle the Sphinx put to Oedipus, the answer was "Myself." He was the black-white orphan boy the DeFoes had adopted in Greece and brought up in Salem, Mass. The data banks DBC had access to would have a record of that.

But the blast had cut the Pythia off before she could respond to prompting. Something else had spoken the prophecy and was fulfilling it. He was returning to the sea. The waste-gray sea they were the death of was the mother of all.

Black white, white black. He looked at his hand as he ran, turning it over and back. The black of me hand to meself. He had a fleeting vision of a dolphin leaping. Dolphins were black above and white below. The dolphin died a rainbow death.

Was deep-soiled Phthia real or did it stand for death? Socrates had dreamt that there appeared to him the likeness of a woman, fair and comely, clothed in bright raiment, who called to him and said, "O Socrates, the third day hence to deep-soiled Phthia shalt thou go." Socrates, knowing *phthein* meant "to pass away," had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

analyzed his own dream.

John shook his head tiredly. Had that been Socrates or Homer? Socrates. Homer had to do with another riddle. How did it go? Way back yander, old Uncle Homer ax some boys comin' back from fishin' in a pon'er water some'rs in de naberhood w'at dey done cotch. "What we caught we threw away; what we could not catch we kept." En den, bless grashus! pore old Uncle Homer blew a blood vessel and died because he couldn't solve it. The answer was *phtheir,* "louse."

Must you clutter your head with such trivia? Phtheir, indeed! It is Phthia we are heading for and Phthia is real. And it is phthein if we fail to reach it in time.

"Well, now." John stopped short. "The question is, are *you* for real?"

Of course. The panic again. *We are wasting time.*

"Did you heal the bullet wound, or did I only imagine I got shot?"

I healed it. Now move.

John unstoppered his thumb from the bottle. "If I'm only going to Phthia, it's safe to drink the water." He took a swig. It was warm with the sun and bitter with the rinse of retsina but he drank it thirstily. He wiped his mouth. "Okay. Explain."

Only if you keep moving.

Only if you explain.

Okay.

By God, he had said that only in his head and the thing had answered.

Of course. Now if you will keep your body moving and your mind still, I will explain.

With a sigh, John got going again.

Phthia, or Achaea Phthiotis, the realm of — yes, I see you know the name — Achilles, was a district of Thessaly having a coastal plain on the Gulf of Pagasae. Today, I see, you call that bay the Gulf of Volos. The spot we want is offshore. You do not know it, but the maps and charts you have glanced at during your brief lifetime remain in your mind. So I have been able to pinpoint the spot. It is 39° 10' north latitude and 23° 1' east longitude. Of course, I have allowed for the whirlpool of the ecliptic and for the African plate's moving northward and plowing into the plate containing the Eurasian landmass.

Of course. But why do we want this offshore spot?

Radiation. Panic irradiated the thought. *That was the one thing I failed to allow for: late or soon thermonucleonics would find Earth, but its genesis here came sooner than I thought, and the fallout has proved greater. My space vessel is at that spot. I see you do not know the collision cross*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

section or the straggling distribution function for the materials and particles in question. It is enough for you to know my space vessel is hot. Very hot. I must find it and lift off for home before it explodes.

Who are you? What are you? Where do you hail from?

Keep moving. The reader already knows all that.

Reader? What reader?

It will come to pass that someone will fictionalize this episode and, out of storytelling determinism, will detail my origins in a prologue. For the reader, at this point, what's prologue is past.

Hold on, man. How will the writer know what to set down in the prologue if you don't spill it here and now?

Whatever he dreams up and sets down will do well enough. That job's his: why not let him earn his pay? It is enough for you to know that I am a gas —

A gas!

A noble *gas. What you on Earth would call eka-radon, a neutron-rich isotope of element 118. My structure resists spontaneous fission, and I'm immune to other forms of decay. I live for billions of years —*

Man, hold on. You're all right but what about me? I'm Jack. What are all these rich neutrons doing to my poor body?

Have no fear, Jack. I generate stasitrons. These maintain the status quo, a skin of sameness, at the interface. But — panic — *keep running, Jack.*

He ran through a fawn-colored afternoon. He had used up the water long since and his throat burned and he tasted bile. He ran cross-country toward Lamia. The gas had told him that from there they could take train, bus, or rented car to Farsala and from Farsala to Volos. He had thanked the gas; he had begun to think he'd have to hoof it all the way. One good thing, the gas took care of the blisters as fast as they formed. Noble gas. He shook his head.

Delicate creepers festooned the trees. The people hereabouts called them Nereid-spinnings. As he tore through, he plucked a large black Amphissa olive. He froze with the unripe olive and his soul between his teeth.

He thought at first it was an angry olive grower aiming the gun. But as he raised both hands, he wondered how a farmer came by a Soviet Kalashnikov assault gun.

His eyes went from the gun to the man. There was his answer. The man looked like Che Guevara.

John spat out the olive while trying to retain his soul. What could he say? He had come to join them in the struggle against the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

junta? He was only passing through?

The Che did not ask him to say anything. The Che motioned with the gun.

They all looked like Che. They camped in a cleft in a rock outcropping. The midday demon had them waiting in furious boredom. They seemed glad to see the sentry bring him in. His captor poked him toward Che Prime, who sat leaning back oiling his Kalashnikov while another pair of Ches frisked John.

They emptied his pockets, tossing his wallet and the ring to Che Prime. John started. He had forgotten the cardinal's ring. They sat him down and tied him up. Che Prime looked from John's papers to John's face. He tapped the radio at his side.

"There is an alarm out for you, Comrade Yanni." Che Prime slid the ring on and held his hand out to admire the synthesis. "We will keep this for the cause. And your money. We will decide later what to do about you."

They had decided already. They talked among themselves of the hot work of clearing ground for a small landing strip. In a few days they would be getting the shipment. What did that sing of, arms or heroin? They did not bother to say because they already knew. But what they did say was too much. They talked too freely in front of him for them not to have decided to kill him.

He could see their side of it. If they let him go and the junta picked him up, the junta would make him talk. Once a man started talking to Major Anagnostis, he would not stop till he had emptied himself. He would give away this cleft, their strength, their plans.

Panic pipped up. *Jack, we can't just sit here. Time's dripping out.*

You mean running out, man.

I mean dripping out. The gas built a working model of a clepsydra in his mind. *See? A water clock.*

Watch it, man. We don't want water on the brain. Look, this is like wasting a long-distance call talking about the bad connection. They got me hogtied, man. It's up to you.

All right, Jack.

The gas breathed out of him. He gave a silently echoing sigh.

Free to think his own thoughts. Free to be himself. If he were only free to cut and ran.

He saw where the gas had gone to: it was to the leader. Che Prime's brow pleated and unpleated like an accordion. He shoved himself unwillingly to his feet and, fighting himself, swung his Kalashnikov at the others. In a tight voice he told them to lay down their arms.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

They were slow to move. A burst that stitched the ground at their feet quickened them. He cradled the Kalashnikov in his left arm, finger at the ready, and held them off while he took up their weapons one by one to batter the barrels against a boulder. The Ches' eyes darkened the air with daggers.

John twisted himself around to make the knots easier to get at. As he lay there waiting, it struck him that the gas did not need him any more. It could ride Che Prime away and leave him behind with the other Ches.

He strained around in time to see Che Prime turn to him. Che Prime's finger trembled on the trigger. But Che Prime swung the gun away from John and covered the others again one handed while he drew a knife and cut the ropes.

John rose stiffly to his feet. He felt the gas begin to breathe itself back into him. Che Prime held the gun out to him.

All right, Jac. Take the gun.

Not so fast. Let me limber up.

The gas whooshed all the way back into Che Prime, and John let the man stand holding the gun out to him in helpless rage while he took his time rubbing his wrists and flexing his fingers. Some of the Ches looked ready to jump the man.

John snatched the gun and backed away quickly, covering the lot.

Free at last. Free to cut and run.

Time to move now, before the gas repossessed him. But a strange jealousy possessed him. He had the honor — if that was the word — of being in at the start. Why should another enjoy — if that was the word — being in at the end?

It should prove interesting to see what shape the space vessel took. Besides, what else did he have on his agenda? His parents were dead. Xenia was gone. He had no ties. He was on the run. Might as well run to Phthia as anywhere. He was free to see it through.

He moved nearer Che Prime to make it easier for the gas.

He felt it breathe itself in.

All right, Jack?

All right, noble gas.

Then let's go, Jack.

One bitty minute.

He held out his free hand to Che Prime.

Shaking more sensibly with rage now that he was under his own control, Che Prime handed back the wallet and the ring.

And John was off and running again.

6

"Most men are bad." — Bias

More than once on the train

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ride from Lamia to Farsala and the bus ride from Farsala to Volos, he wished he had the gun back. Before entering Lamia he had hidden the gun under a pile of stones.

He had washed up, he had bought a hat to hide his hair, and he had bought a new shirt, new pants, new shoes. But in spite of the new threads, and in spite of his working on them to look not too new, he knew he stood out. The cynosure, man, the focus of Argus's eyes.

If anyone had made him out from the description on the air, no one had turned him in yet. But there had been times when he thought a stiffly dressed farmer or housewife eyeing him would light up and the whole coach become a Christmas tree of accusing eyes and a pandemonium of fuzz-raising voices. Each time he told himself that would be the gas's worry. But each time he also wished for the gun. Not necessarily to use but to have. Phallic, man, phallic.

All right, Jack. Let's go.

I know. One day hence I shall return to my mother.

He made his way down to the waterfront. On a muddy strip of beach he found a kid trying to hook a driftwood stick with a handle from a broken vase. The kid had tied the handle to a long piece of cord, put the stick in the soft sand a foot behind a line he had scratched, and stood behind a parallel toe line four or five feet away making his casts.

The kid looked at John with a measuring eye, but when John walked by with no more than a glance in passing, the kid put the eye back on the stick he was trying to hook. The gas reached out as they went by.

John kept his gaze on the gulf. Volos stood at the head of the gulf. From here he could see the great bay sweep away on both hands. Somewhere out there ...

The gas brought back the image of a hulk of a man — likely larger than life-size because in the kid's eyes — and the name and the look of the taberna where the man hung out.

The man we want is Phaedon Zora. He has a name for hiring out his caique on shady ventures and for smuggling on his own.

There were many tabernas, often the names had faded out, and they looked alike. John passed between two things that hung drying in the sun: a net and an octopus. A sponge fisherman older than his years was beating sand out of the sponges, clipping away the blackness, then soaking the sponges and stuffing them into sacks. He had a rash from the anemones that sponge on the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sponges. Diving had deafened him and he did not hear John ask him the way.

He followed John's shadow up and nodded and went back to his job. John sensed the gas breathing a thread between his mind and the sponge fisherman's. The deaf man looked shaken at his sudden magic of hearing and his arm trembled as he pointed the way.

John stepped into the dim room. Patina'd coins tossed in a reforming scatter in front of his eyes, sequin-sized images of the sun. The gas hastened the adaptation, and he made out Phaedon Zora at once, alone at a table. The man looked smaller in John's eyes, but he was big enough.

Other men sat sullenly at other tables. The junta had banned the favorite card game *koum-kan* and had fixed a fine for smashing crockery. None dared talk politics, and the weather did not weather much discussion. There was nothing to do but listen to safe music and drink.

John bought a bottle of metaxa, asked for two glasses, went to Phaedon Zora's table, and stood inquiringly by an empty chair waiting for Zora to take notice of him. Zora's face betrayed no curiosity. He nodded absently for John to sit.

When the bottle got down to a third, John got down to business.

"You have a boat."

"And in my bladder I have enough water to float it. By your leave."

He got up and left. John sat a moment, then followed to his namesake, the primitive John at the end of the building. A basin of slaked lime sat in the corner, and a batch of newspaper squares hung on a nail in the wall.

The death of Xenia Leandros leaped from a news item. He read while Zora pissed away. An earthquake, only a slight tremor really, had hit Delphi, but the girl had died of heart failure rather than from any fall of stone. The kapetanios zipped up.

"So, come clean. Here we can talk. I have a caique. You wish to go out on Pagasitikos Kolpos?"

"On the Gulf of Volos, yes."

"It is a big gulf."

"Can you navigate well enough to find 39° 10' north by 23° 1' east?"

Phaedon Zora's caterpillar eyebrows crawled as he consulted a mental chart.

"That would be off Palaio-Trikeri. You are going diving there?"

John found himself nodding.

The kapetanios narrowed his eyes. "Off Palaio-Trikeri the water is fifty meters and more."

Well, it wasn't as if the space vessel lay buried in glabigerina

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ooze at 1,000 to 3,000 fathoms. He nodded.

Zora leaned toward him. "You know something?"

John shrugged.

Zora leaned back. "If it is something from the old time —" He gestured that it was out of his hands.

"It is not that sort of thing."

"At least that is in your favor. A Greek archaeological observer must go along when one dives for such things. But I still do not like it. A lone foreigner hiring a boat to go diving draws official notice."

John fumbled for his pocket — he was still not used to his new pants — and in it. He pulled out the cardinal's ring with his wallet and put it back quickly, but not before he caught a glint of its gold in the skipper's wine-dark eyes.

He counted out two hundred dollars.

"Officials have enough to do. Why should we trouble them over one day's diving?"

"One day?"

"I will find what I seek tomorrow or never."

Zora hooked the money.

"Never blush to tell an honest business. On the other hand, never ask if you can go. Somebody may say no. Tonight at ten bring your gear to the root of the mole. My caique will be taking on water."

John spent the balance of the day and the money shopping for scuba gear. As his cab neared the mole, John eyed the blue caique with the gas's curiosity. On his own he winked at the oculus, the eye of the God, on the prow of the caique. She was a marine diesel craft, racy-looking, sloop-rigged, low-waisted, with clipper bow and rounded stern. The cab driver helped him load his gear aboard the caique.

Like most caique skippers, Phaedon Zora kept a black-hilted knife always at hand to pin a wind to the mast. With a look at the cab driver he stuck it into the mast now, and the cab driver went away tight-lipped.

Water bubbled at the mouth of the tank, and Zora took the hose out and hung it back up on the mole hydrant. He had already topped up the caique's diesel fuel tank, and they cast off and got under way. She chugged into the southerly breeze and dwindled the double lights of the yachts and coasters berthed stern to the quay.

Zora held her steady on 180° and slowly the dark bulk of Pelion grew to the sky in the southeast. After two hours John offered to take a trick, but Zora shook his head. The caique bored into the night.

The gas studied the stars. Zora's laugh brought John awake.

"I have never seen a man sleep

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with his eyes open."

He showed John where to turn to. John came awake again when Zora cut the engine. It was still dark. Three a.m. by the underwater watch he had bought. *Today I shall return to my mother.*

Anchor splash broke the engine-dulled silence. Zora pointed to port.

"Palaio-Trikeri."

John saw nothing but the mass of Pelion; then the gas enhanced some rocky humps in the water a few miles away.

Zora took a bearing on two objects on shore and rechecked them a quarter hour later to see if the boat was dragging anchor. Then he fell asleep at once.

John found himself studying the stars again.

Can you see your own star?

Alpha Phoenicis? Not at this latitude, Jack.

Homesick?

Yes and no, Jack.

Earthsick?

Yes and no, Jack.

You're ambiguous from the word go, aren't you? Have you been laughing at us?

Yes and no, Jack.

Well, you sure had fun with the House of Atreus. After Atreus hamburgered his brother Thyestes' children and fed them to Thyestes, Thyestes came to you for advice. You told him to rape his own daughter and so raise him another son to avenge him.

Aegisthus, as we remember.

Right, noble gas. And after this boy Aegisthus killed Atreus and later Agamemnon, Agamemnon's son Orestes came to you for advice. You told him to avenge his father by killing Aegisthus. Nice going, noble gas: you did a full-circle job chez *Atreus.*

I did not do it, Jack. The House of Atreus did it to itself.

Yes and no. You were right there dishing out advice.

Do not blame the tool, Jack.

But a thinking tool? Shouldn't it answer for its answers? Come to that, haven't we been the tool's tools?

Jack, we see differently. If you think you have to pan me, all right. But I wish we did not have to part on this note.

Can you say you're leaving Earth better than you found it?

Yes and no.

I give up.

At first light he breakfasted on a bar of unsweetened chocolate, passing up Zora's offer of bread, cheese, and wine. He would have liked to warm up running in sand but settled for running in place. He felt in good shape. The bullet wound was only the ghost of a memory and the ghost of a scar. Faint as it was it caught Zora's eye

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when John stripped to his shorts. His marathon run had sweated the last ounce of fat from him, and his flesh pebbled in the chill stir of air.

Zora stood at the taffrail, watching John exercise or looking away in thought. His thumb rubbed a holiday in the paintwork. The spot was almost a groove. He must have worn it away in thought during many hours at the tiller. He shook his head when his eyes met John's and patted his midriff overhang. But that ruefulness didn't fool John; the man was a lot of beefy muscle and knew it.

John toweled himself, then kept the towel draped on his shoulders while he saw to his gear. He had chosen a constant-volume suit; the hood and the diving mask were part of the suit. His aqualung was a demand regulator with an air-reserve device. His fins were full-foot to protect against sea urchins, rock, and coral. He would carry three cylinders, each holding 7 liters of air at a pressure of 200 atmospheres.

He checked tank pressure and valves. He checked harness, backpack, buckles. He strapped the backpack to the tanks and locked it on. He covered the air intake on the regulator with his thumb and inhaled through the mouthpiece. No air came through. Good. He took his thumb away and blew briskly through the mouthpiece to free any sticky check valves. He cracked the tank valve to blow any sand or dust out of the valve opening. He checked the regulator intake orifice for signs of blockage. He checked the air hose for cracks or damage. He aligned regulator intake with tank outlet and made sure the O ring gasket was in place and the hoses pointing upward. He tightened the regulator butterfly valve finger-tight. He opened the tank air valve all the way, counterclockwise, then gave it a half turn clockwise. He breathed through the mouthpiece a few times to make sure the regulator worked. He turned off the tank valve.

Zora shook his head a bit, and John knew he was thinking of the sponge divers and how they went down without all this business. John was thinking of the sponge divers too; he had seen the way the bends had crippled them.

He got into his constant-volume suit. He removed the co2 cartridge from his Mae West. He operated the detonator a few times to make sure the puncture pin worked. He lubricated the cartridge with silicone and inserted it. He inflated the vest by mouth and looked for leaks, deflated it, and put it on.

Zora meanwhile got out his binoculars and glassed long and carefully. He seemed happy to see nothing on land or water.

LICENSED TO MSG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

John dropped a shot line overboard, vitalizing it first with knots every ten feet to mark decompression stops. He strapped a knife in a brass sheath to his leg. The stainless steel blade had a plain cutting edge on one side and a saw edge on the other. It tied to its sheath with a length of stout line. on his left wrist he strapped a depth gauge. It had a pointer to indicate the maximum depth you reached on a dive and an extra calibration to calculate your residual nitrogen in successive dives. On his right wrist he strapped an underwater watch with an alarm you could set to warn you when to start your ascent and with a lapsed-time bezel to keep track of bottom time and to time decompression stops.

Zora helped him put on his scuba. He adjusted harness for comfortable fit, with regulator a half inch below the back of his head when he tipped his head way back. He checked the reserve air valve to make sure it worked freely. He set it in UP position. He wet his fins to make them easier to slip on. He put on leather-palmed work gloves, dark-colored to keep from attracting dangerous fish. He put on his weight belt. He rechecked his air valve to make sure it was full open. He spat into the mask.

He heard a nasty laugh in his mind. *Superstitious?*

John didn't bother to think an answer. He rubbed the inside of the glass thoroughly and washed it out with a little water.

I see. To keep it from fogging. Sorry, Jack, but I've seen fishermen spit on bait and I thought...

You thought. You're just impatient. And after nearly two thousand years of just hanging around.

He positioned the mouthpiece and adjusted the mask. Now he was ready to go in. He made a rock-back entry: venting a sigh, he sat on the rail, back to the water, held the mask and mouthpiece firmly in place, and rolled backward into the womb. He flutter-kicked himself downward.

A few feet underwater he felt pressure on his eardrums. He cleared his ears by pinching his nosrils together and snorting. He looked up. The sun looked like a flame through cloudy wine. At thirty feet he cleared his ears again. Soon after, his mask flooded. It was a self-purging mask, with a one-way flutter valve in the faceplate. He lowered his head in a nod and blew through his nose. The mask cleared.

He tried to keep to less than 75 feet per minute to avoid mask squeeze. But as he dove deeper the building pressure forced the mask against his face. He breathed

LICENSED TO MELCOM
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gently through his nose to equalize the pressure. The mask let up.

Red vanished from the light, then orange, then green. Now the world was gray blue.

Start looking, noble gas.

At these depths he could spend only five minutes at a time on the bottom.

All right, Jack.

He started looking on his own, scanning the ribbed bottom. Off to his left he spotted what had to be an artifact.

Is that it?

Without waiting for the gas to answer he made for the spot. It was an old wreck. Worms had eaten away the hulk, leaving cannon, ballast stones, pottery, and an anchor or two.

Come away, Jack. It should be more to the west.

His body followed the gas's gaze. Nothing lay to the west. He kicked east. He kicked north. He knicked south. They quartered a hundred-meter circle.

Are you sure your inertial guidance system's working?

I'm sure. But he felt the gas's panic. *I have to be sure.*

He forced the gas to look with him at the watch.

Time to go up, if you don't want to go through decompression stops.

There it is!

It looked smaller than he had expected it to be, and he knew it to be smaller than it looked. Water magnified; an object 12 feet away seemed 9 feet away. Close up, it was no larger than what it most resembled, a krater or urn of antiquity. It was not pottery, though, and in place of the open bowl for mixing wine and water it had a closed top. Whatever metal it was, electrolysis had not dissolved any of it. No barnacles clung to it. It was heavy to the feel: far too heavy to surface with. But unless its matter had dwarf-star weight—

It doesn't.

— it would be easy to rig and raise. He got a cutaway picture of the urn. It showed the shell of the urn to be a sandwich. The outer layer was permeable inward to allow a recharging buildup of the radiation that was the vessel's fuel. The middle layer was a radiation sponge. The inner layer was impermeable to protect the occupant.

He was already on his way to the shot line. He yanked on it and Zora gave him slack. He tied a bowline where the krater was narrowest. He took off his weight belt and snapped it around the rope, gave the rope a go-ahead yank, and kicked himself upward.

The urn passed him. He was holding himself to a rate of ascent of 60 feet per minute. Any slower would be to absorb more nitrogen.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Any faster would be to bring on an air embolism and the bends. Before the urn passed away through the interface it took on the pale-yellow look of electrum.

How Zora's eyes would bug out! For gold and silver content alone such a vessel would be worth a fortune. That was a thing to think about. Zora was a man to watch.

He did not feel fatigue in his arm and shoulder muscles from the work with the krater and the rope or in his legs from the steady flutter kick. So he probably did not have too high a concentration of nitrogen in those tissues. But to play it safe he stopped at about ten feet from the surface for a few minutes, breathing normally.

He broke through the interface and made ready to hand his gear aboard. Zora leaned over, reaching out a hand. Zora, to John's disappointment, betrayed no astonishment.

"Is that it? One piece?"

He nodded. The gas fixed his eyes on the urn gleaming wetly on deck and so filled his mind with euphoria that he failed to watch Zora.

He came dreamily awake swaying upright on the bottom. The air had a heavily metallic taste. But that did not take away from his sense of well-being. He looked down at himself. Zora had wired the weight belt to his feet and had slashed the Mae West. How foolish of Zora. The weights belonged at the waist, not at the feet.

He bent down to reach the belt and take the weights out of the pouches. He fell on his face. That was very funny. Zora had also wired his hands behind his back, probably with the same copper wire. He rolled over and sat up. He looked around.

The anchor line had gone, and the caique and its shadow. He saw the gouge in the seabed where the anchor had been. Zora had Crusoefied him, and somewhere lost in the labyrinth of his mind there was panic. But euphoria filled him in waves that overrode the throbbing of his temples. Here in the gray-blue world he felt happy and at home.

Jack. Do you want to die?

Ah, his old friend the Old Man of the Sea. *Welcome aboard.* His watch was warning his right wrist that he'd better begin his ascent, and no doubt his depth gauge was screaming about his residual nitrogen. But at the moment he had a mild reproach to deliver.

Why did you let Zora knock me out and weigh me down and heave me overboard?

Your reflex as he knocked you out was to hold your mouthpiece in place. I couldn't breathe out of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your mask fast enough to take him over in time to keep him from weighting and jettisoning you.

Why didn't you fight back with my body?

I couldn't get hold of your mind. It went too chaotic to handle. You still aren't back to your senses. Your nitrogen narcosis is fighting me. You have to sober up if we're going to use your body.

I think I'll call you Albert Ross. Jack.

Why, hello there. I was just thinking about you. How's the world treating you, Al?

He felt his field of consciousness narrow again, the blackness iris in. But it was fun to contemplate this miniaturizing of space and time. You could *see* possibility squeeze to pass through the sphincter of Now ...

One slave delta silts the other under the gravitational pull of time. The future is fast finding out the future is past finding out. Out is without surcease, theodicy a loophole in nothingness, absolute Zeno. Agathis unwinds to agathon. This way to the egress. Eorge Ashington's ammy? Lock Barnum's door, lest the pen elope with the letter.

Jack, you're dreaming.

In the arms of amorphous, Al. More pith anon. Pythagoras couldn't shoot for beans. The upshot of upsilon slingshot is trivia. Didn't know grits from granola. The priests with their pneuma and the soldiers with their corporality. The question is why Napoleon riddled the Sphinx. Achilles' heel was his legend. At Waterloo he didn't have an urn to urinate in.

Jack.

Not now, Al. Where was I? Somewhere west of Zeus. Melas, Mass. It's the things you forget that you have to think about. Cora Xenia. You're forgetting the mach factor of one whose hand, like the hyper moron, hit a homer. Psyche, Dike, Nike, Tyche, let a tangent locate my key. Andrew said: The mark of Zorro lives. Give him the future as a going-away present. Gibbous this night our nightly bride. Cora. A rhythm a tic, a rhythm a tic. Flow and ebb: teach an old bitch a new twitch. It was only in the head but Andrew knew. That's the whole thing: the —

Jack, there's no time.

Now you tell me. Dammit, Al, I almost had it. Shoo, old man. There was an old man of Thermopylae, Who never did anything properly; But they said, "If you choose, To boil eggs in your shoes, You shall never remain in Thermopylae." Al, do you realize if that ostracized dude boiled eggs in his shoes he'd have a hot gait? And hot gaiters.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jack, snap out of it.

In two shakespeares of a lamb's tale. King Lear, that was. Have a lime rickey on the House of Atreus.

You mean a dry martini. From my reading of Martini's Law in your mind, at 150 feet nitrogen pressure hits you like three dry martinis on an empty stomach. I've been trying to dry you out, but to tell you the truth it's having a strange effect on me, Jack.

Do you good to go on a bender once in a while, Al. Don't forget the olive. Say, hear that noise each time I inhale? That means I'm on reserve. The automatic reserve valve cuts in when the tank pressure drops to 300 psi. We don't have a lot of air left, Al.

I agree, Jack. Last time the fire. This time the lack of air. Alas, the heir. The mate-child. The seed. the flare of the star. Fleshflower.

Al, snap out of it.

Not an albatross, Jack. A phoenix. Shall I tell you how —

Al, there's no time. It's all right for you. You can whoosh out any time you want to and grab a dolphin or something, but I'm stuck.

You do have a problem, Jack. Do you good to take your mind off it. Let me tell you about —

You're babbling. What about your space vessel? You were in a panic to find it before it blows up."

Mustn't exaggregate, Jack. Not the world. Only a good part of it.

Aren't you going after the damn thing? Are you going to let Zora get away with it? Even if you don't care about Earth, don't you need the thing to take you back home?

Home. Damn right I want to go home. Damn right I don't want to let Zora get away with it. All right, Jack, here we go.

I don't feel us moving.

You may not feel anything, Jack, but I'm springing into action.

I feel something. Al, what are you doing to my nose and throat?

I'm forming a membrane, Jack, an artificial gill to let you breathe the oxygen in the water. You won't need the damn tanks of air. There. Lift off your mask and breathe.

Can't. My hands. Wired behind my back.

Do you have faith in me, Jack?

Yes and no.

Strain your hands apart.

The wire only cuts deeper into them.

That's all right, Jack. That's just what we want. Pull your hands away from each other.

That's just what we want? Al, one of us is crazy.

It's the only way, Jack. Remember, I healed your bullet wound.

I remember you made me a target first.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He pulled his hands steadily apart against the bite of the wire and felt pain but give.

Al, I see what you're doing.

He was glad he could not see what Al was doing.

If you put a wire loop around a propped-up block of ice and tie a heavy weight to the bottom of the loop, the wire will slowly move down through the block without cutting the block apart. The block heals as the wire cuts.

A fair analogy, Jack. Go on. You're doing fine.

But I'm not ice, man. I'm flesh and bone.

Don't worry, Jack. I'm with you all the way. Steady as she goes.

The wire dropped away. The suddenness of freedom took his hands shoulder high. He brought them around and looked at them. He flexed the fingers. He let each hand feel the other. He saw the rubber at his wrists had healed as well as his flesh: cuts had beaded together. A good job, though he did find a few hesitation marks.

He bent to untwist the copper wire binding the weight belt to his feet. He had been at worse than 150 feet for worse than twenty minutes. On any other dive he would now have to waste worse than two hours on five decompression stops. But the gas seemed to have seen to the nitrogen. He flutter-kicked upward.

He backed water. He guessed the gas was using his senses better than he was. He found himself facing around and looking up before he was aware that he felt the beat of engines.

Two vessels converged overhead. One had the blue hull of the caique. The other, with a white hull, was a large cargo ship with an ice-cutterlike spoon stem that would not have been noticeable topside because the vessel was riding heavy. The cargo ship cut the caique off and rammed it.

The two vessels locked bows. John thought the gas sensed that he heard shots. The two vessels remained spliced for a minute or two; then the cargo ship's stem backed out, and the caique was free to gout water into its wound and sink. After another minute three weighted bodies followed the caique down.

All three trailed bright green streamers. At that depth blood was bright green. Zora still gripped his knife. His killers had riddled him, but he had taken two of them with him.

Hold it here, Jack. I'll be right back.

The gas wooshed out. The light grew slightly dimmer, though that merely enhanced the phosphorescent wake of the gas — if it was wake and not the gas itself — as the gas made for the corpse of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Phaedon Zora. John held station, choking back fear.

Now that he was on his own he absorbed the full meaning of the artificial gill. He had been damn casual about the fact that his lungs had collapsed, that he was breathing in a way he had been born to some millions of years ago. He had to stay calm; he had to remember that the gill was working. He wasn't sure just how.

But he knew that his breathing was bypassing his lungs; his blood was passing through the gill; the gill removing the CO_2 waste and taking in fresh oxygen from the surrounding water. What little water trickled through was fresh water; the salts in the sea water did not permeate the gill because their molecules were too big. The trickle of water felt refreshing.

The phosphorescence vanished on reaching Zora's corpse. Black froth jetted from the nostrils and mouth. The corpse twitched, the knife hand made stabbing motions. The phosphorescence reappeared and streaked back toward John.

John's chest gave dry heaves as the gas repossessed him. The corpse showed happy relaxation, eulysis, as if the gas had induced abreaction, catharsis. He wondered if he looked like that corpse. To hell with Zora.

What did you learn, Al? He had no doubt the gas had learned something. *I've been thinking about why he left me the air. He didn't want to kill me; he only wanted me to die. That's the worst kind.*

Al held off answering. The cargo ship had stopped engines, and they watched its anchor splash down and hook.

Head for the caique, Jack. I'll tell you on the way.

John flutter-kicked himself down toward the sunken caique.

As through Zora's eyes darkly he watched Zora's hands wire his hands and weight his feet and roll him overboard. Then he, as Zora, moved toward folded clothing and went through pockets and pulled out the cardinal's ring and put it on and kissed it and laughed. He laughed again, hefting the goldly gleaming urn, and began wrapping it in burlap. He straightened, sensing something doing in the waters just the other side of Palaio-Trikeri. He watched a balloon lift high into the air, then stop. Its umbilical cord caught the silken sun and showed why it had stopped. He raised anchor, raised sail for silence, rounded the headland. The cargo ship lay at anchor, the balloon tethered to her radio shack. A hatch opened and a small plane on an elevator platform rose into view. A lookout caught Zora glassing them. The ship upped anchor and gave chase.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The ship rammed the caique. A half dozen armed men boarded her. Zora got two before they finished him.

He died too soon to know whether they took my craft.

The caique's oculus watched John approach. The space vessel was not aboard.

All right, Jack.

I know. The cargo ship.

With a watery sigh he headed for the cargo ship's anchor line. He made a midcourse correction.

Jack, what are you — Oh.

He tugged the ring off Phaedon Zora's finger, put it in a pocket of his rubber suit, then veered back toward the anchor line. He hand-over-handed himself up and broke surface. The cargo ship rolled in a slight swell. Her name was *World Olympics*.

His lungs filled with air as sails fill with sudden wind.

Easy, Jack.

He had to get used to lungs again. He was embarrassed to ask.

Do I still have the gill?

Yes, Jack. It's there when you need it, like—a nictitating membrane.

He pulled himself up and looked over. The balloon still hung in the air, a trapped bubble. Weather balloon? No: even a quick glance showed him the plane was a drone. The balloon, then, served as skyhook for the antenna they needed to keep in control of the drone when it passed over the sea-level curve of the horizon.

They. They looked Chinese. There were a dozen of them around the space vessel. Maybe they wanted to salvage what they could from their pyrrhic victory over Zora. Maybe they believed the vessel to be some new sort of mine. The drone seemed ready for launch, but for the time being they had forgotten the drone. They stood or knelt around Al's space vessel, poking and prodding at it with hand and tool, looking for openings and chattering away at each other in what sounded like Chinese.

This is it, Jack.

You're leaving, Al?

It's time, Jack.

Can't you tell me...

Tell you what, Jack?

Can't you tell me what I need to know?

You need to know too many things, Jack.

But you must see what I need to know most.

I see what you need to know first.

Al, what is it?

The key to the DBC computer.

Al, that's it!... Well?

Well, Jack?

Give me the key.

You know it already, only you do not know you know it. Farewell.

LICENSED TO OCLC
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thanks a bunch.

Good-bye, Jack.

A fine mentor, Al was.

Good-bye, Jack.

He didn't answer. Then it was too late. He was alone.

7

"Practice makes perfect."
— Periander

A hidden valve hissed suddenly, and the gas's space vessel came alive with power. Shouting, the men around it leaped away. It flamed at the base and lifted. They stared up. Then oily smoke poured out from below their feet, and they saw a red-rimmed hole in the steel deckplate.

Shouting again, the group grabbed hoses and extinguishers to fight the fire belowdecks.

John's earth-anchored mind followed the flight. He forced himself to break off. He couldn't hang here forever. Now, when even the lookout had joined the firefighting, was a good time to go. He started to slip back down into the water; then the drone caught his eye again.

He'd have to be rash, he'd have to be mad, to try what he thought of trying. But all at once he felt full of the energy of rashness and madness. Maybe it was madness to stay sane too long, rashness to play it safe too long. Maybe it was time for the hubris of Greeks, the chutzpa of Hebrews. He pulled himself aboard.

He slid as swiftly and smoothly as his shadow over the deck. He hoped the sun would steam his damp tracks away.

The fuselage had a hinged lid. There was a full payload: by the stencilings, crates of Kalashnikovs. A net sling enfolded the crates and tied to a chute and a release mechanism. Sweating, turning to liquid in the rubber suit, he untied and opened the net and lifted the crates out and shoved them and the sling beneath a tarp that stood handy just under the after castle.

When it came to crawling into the cramped space after he had emptied the fuseledge, he found he still had on his scuba pack. He unharnessed himself and stowed the pack under the tarp with the arms. He climbed into the fuselage and pulled the lid down.

Tora, tora, tora. Now, now, now.

It was later, later, later. The firefighting took time, as did talking, no doubt dealing with what-the-hell new kind of missile that had been. But the now finally came and the drone busied and John catapulted into the wild black and blue.

Five minutes into the flight it seemed safe to make his move. He

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was tired of stiffness and darkness. he reached up and raised the lid and took a firm grip on it and wrenched and twisted it. He felt the plane correct for his shifting weight. The plane's construction was aluminum-covered foam, and it didn't take too much force to pop the rivets holding the lid to its hinges. He gave the lid a toss over the side, a vigorous toss to miss the tail structure. He pulled the glass of his mask over his eyes and sat up in his cockpit.

The plane was droning southwest. Right on course. He knew what welcome he would get from the Ches if he paid their camp in the cleft another visit. They were expecting arms not the man, and he would have liked to see their faces. But he was not that mad, not that rash. He would take over control of the drone and land it far from the Ches.

He bent to look inside. With the cockpit wide open there was light in plenty to read the telemetering instruments on the panel wedged far forward. His heart pancaked. This was a sophisticated setup. He had expected the operator on the mother craft to have only a command button to turn for right or left, dive or climb, and a throttle switch to control speed. But the operator would have full control of the drone with full instantaneous feedback, tracking the drone on a television monitor screen that responded to a wide-angle television camera mounted in the nose of the drone.

Once the operator located the drone's target on the screen he would lock it into the craft's controls. Then the screen would go blank, leaving the drone on its own to drop its load and return to a preprogrammed area for recovery.

He had to learn in a hurry how to get around all that. If he saw he couldn't take control, he would have to bail out. He had kept the parachute, using it as a custion on takeoff. Now seemed a good time to put it on, tie it on, or do whatever he could to make a cargo chute a man chute. Before he could reach around for it, he heard a click and felt a give.

The bottom was dropping out. He grabbed the rim of the cockpit. He was hanging by his fingertips, his body streaming in the wind. The chute had gone with the wind. That calm blue was the water at least 7,000 feet below.

The drone banked and circled, looking for his falling figure. The banking helped him better his purchase, and he drew his legs up and braced himself spread-eagled against the walls of the fuselage. If the drone had banked the other way...

It was clear what had happened.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Back on the cargo ship they had found the crates of arms and the scuba pack under the tarp.

The drone nosed down. When it leveled he caught the last of the still-packed chute's splash into the drink. Did the operator and the others believe that had been a man.

As the man in question, hoping to stay alive, he had to believe the operator and the others did not believe that. The drone would not have shown them the quick lightness it would have shown them at the loss of a man's weight. They knew he had managed to stay aboard.

The turn had been a 180° turn. The drone was heading back to the mother ship. If he could have spared the nod, he would have nodded. No point going on with a dropless drop. The drop doors closed. Another mental nod. No point wasting fuel on drag.

He swung his feet to the drone's belly and straddled the doors with the distal edges of his feet resting on the one or two inches of the doorframe. Holding this scatological squat and still gripping the cockpit rim, he tested the doors with the shove of one foot. The latch held.

Maybe they wanted to bring him back alive. Then again, maybe they wanted him to believe that and, hoping to catch him off-guard, would drop the bottom out again.

Keeping his weight on the doorframe, he looked for and found the doors' control cable. Bracing himself with the outward pressure of his knees, he freed his hands to rip the cable out by the roots. He tested the doors. The latch still held. He gave the floor his weight gingerly and gratefully.

He was still a mouse in a pickle jar. But if he could work the stick and the rudder —

The engine cut off suddenly. That annoyed him. He had meant to cut off the engine himself, but not just yet. He wasn't ready. That was what they were hoping, of course. The blinking out of the drop-doors' indicator had alerted them. They'd rather crash the drone than have him escape in it.

With the end of engine noise the air filled with the rattling and banging of control cables and the wheezing and creaking of fuselage. He drew his knife from his leg sheath. He had to cut the right cables: those linking the controls to the mother craft, not those linking the controls to the ailerons and elevators. No time to waver. He had to choose before the drone fell into a spiral dive. He hissed inward and sliced away.

He worked the stick and the rudder. The drone answered. Mushily, but it answered. It was now a glider.

He sat on the cold floor

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

straining forward to reach the stick and the rudder, his eyes just clearing the cockpit rim and his nose rubbing the cockpit rim. He had a variometer to help him judge climb with near-instantaneous reaction and an airspeed indicator to help him control speed in the touchy area just above the stall when he circled to gain altitude. But to see them he would have to duck his head under and fly blind.

Fair-weather cumuli dotted the sky in all directions to the horizon. What he wanted was a cloud-street, a row of cumulus clouds he could fly the plane straight under without circling to gain or maintain altitude. He wanted distance between him and the mother ship.

An omen. He sighted birds soaring without flapping their wings, a sure sign of rising air current. He banked sharply to the right. He caught sight of the mother ship almost directly below. She stood alone in blueness, and glasses winked at him.

He had yet to get the feel of the craft, and the sighting shook him, but he held the plane toward the moving stillness of the birds. The thermal might be fine for birds but too small for a plane to work. And his first sensation was that he had misjudged: right before he flew into the gray mist at cloud base, sink increased rapidly.

Then a strong burst of energy enveloped him. He got into lift. He got into lift, and the urge was to turn right away to latch on to it. But he waited a few heartbeats to keep from turning out of the lift. He knew job. The plane roared along at a steady fifty miles an hour.

He had grown musclebound fighting the controls. Time after time, zero sink grudged into lift. Time after time, he felt the shudder of stall warning. Time after time, it was sink, push nose down, tighten bank, lift, pull nose up. And every minute every muscle quivering. Time to look for a landing. There was only water. He had put it off too long.

The cloud-street grew wet. He found himself circling in weak lift that turned into zero sink. The zero sink turned into rapidly increasing sink. He kicked the clouds from his heels at 5,000 feet and struck off due south at maximum glide in dead air. He gauged the plane's glide angle at thirty to one. That gave him nearly thirty miles to raise a likely spot to land or ditch.

It had waxed cold up there. He had seen ice tear off from the leading edge of the wing in chunks, and he had heard and felt the chunks hammer the tail feathers. Ice had coated his rubber suit. The inside of the cockpit had iced up.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He had shuddered all over. He had tightened his belly because sometimes that helped. That had not helped. His glass was blurry from rubbing the ice away. At least now he was beginning to warm up.

Every now and then he raised up for a look. At last he found it. An island. A yacht mooring and a yacht. This was not the Gulf of Volos and that was not the mother ship. He banked for a closer look.

He made out figures waving at him from the yacht's deck. He waggled his wings. Then he made out the house flag of Viron Kontos. It was the flag on all the Kontos ships and all the Kontos planes. He turned away and lifted up into the bright blank of the sun.

Viron Kontos was the kind to stay in good with whoever stayed in power. Viron Kontos was the kind to turn him over to Major Anagnostis.

He felt the shudder of a stall. He had been lucky enough to hit a small bump at 500 feet, but it was not enough to keep him going. He fought the controls. Just before he struck the sea and the world blacked out, he was aware of a tender putting out from the yacht.

He thought he heard voices, his own among them, but when he opened his eyes, it was to silence and solitude. He felt the room rock. It was not himself, it was the room. He was aboard ship. Mahogany paneling and polar bearskin carpeting told him this had to be Viron Kontos's yacht rocking gently at her mooring.

The cardinal's ring shone from the bedside table. They had found it in the pocket of his wet suit when they stripped him and laid him out. He put the ring on, turning the stone palmward. He looked around unseeing. He had to get away.

His right leg felt heavy and looked bulky under the sheet. He flung the sheet off and found the leg in a cast. The slight effort had wearied him and he fell back. He had to get away.

He tried to hold to that thought, but he could stretch his awareness of Now out only so far before it snapped.

He thought he wakened to see Viron Kontos at his bedside. He thought Kontos put palm to chest and said, "Lucky be this hour. Welcome." He thought he noticed that the man's face had lots of laugh lines, but he thought he wondered if anyone had ever heard the man laugh. He thought he answered, "Welcome?" He thought Viron Kontos flashed a smile like a carving knife. "Of course, my dear Yanni. As son of your father, you find a warm welcome here." "You knew him?" Kontos seemed to look in time's rearview mirror. "I knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him." Then he thought Viron Kontos went quickly deadpan once more and left, leaving behind in the dreamy air only the Cheshire Grinedge of time. But he was not sure.

He was sure this time. Viron Kontos's hair was iron-gray with flecks of rust. Like Nixon and Brezhnev, he had thinned his eyebrows to bring his eyes out of sinister shadows. The laugh lines were there but the face was serious.

"You look better already. Though the doctor ordered me to tell you not to put your weight on that foot for quite some time. He will be back to see you in a day or so."

"I have to thank you —"

Kontos waved thanks away. "Will you do us the honor of dining with us?" Without waiting for an answer he opened the door. "Stegmas."

A giant sailor came in bearing a folded wheelchair. He wrapped a brand-new robe just John's size around the brand-new pajamas just John's size, unfolded the chair, lifted John into it, and wheeled him to the dining salon.

The yacht was a floating art gallery. The passageways, the staterooms they passed, and the dining salon were backgrounds for masterpieces. On the paneled bulkhead facing John as he sat at the table hung an El Greco he had never heard of. It pictured an odd trinity: veteran Roman soldier, young woman with the washing and trimming and curling and oiling utensils of a hairdresser, and a painter. The brass plate on the frame read *Toledoth Yeshu.* On the bulkhead to his right hung a work Kontos had commissioned from Andrew Wyeth. It pictured in realistic detail an elderly woman sitting in left profile, a pattern of footprints across her granny dress. The brass plate on the frame read *Colson's Grandmother.*

Kontos nodded, following John's eyes.

"Yes, the yacht *Circe* isn't bad. I'd have preferred to entertain you up in my house on the island, only I'm having it done over." He shot a glance at Evridiki as she walked languidly in. "For the fourth or fifth time."

Kontos did not get up as his wife entered, and she did not look at Kontos. Her eyes flickered over John as he shoved himself upward on his good leg. Kontos spoke to the air.

"We are not speaking today. But maybe she will shake hands with our guest."

She took John's hand as impersonally as a mother feeling a baby to see if he's wet his diaper. But when Viron glanced their way,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

she pressed her body to John, soft and warm.

"Poor boy. What an awful accident. You are lucky to be alive."

Viron looked down at his place setting. The softness and warmth eneded. Evridiki took her seat. She bent her taut melons over the melon she spooned. She wore her hair like blinders and kept stroking it out of the way.

"The sick world is her oyster. But she is angry because I have passed up a chance to buy the world's largest pearl."

"That is not why I am angry. He knows that." Evridiki also spoke to the air.

"X-rays show the irritant speck that originally annoyed the oyster to be an oily particulate. No matter that good has come out of evil. I don't want that pearl to become the Kontos Pearl. I own oil tankers and there would be bad jokes about oil spills on the water."

If they thought they embarrassed him with their family spat, they were wrong. He was enjoying the meal. It was a gourmet meal, but he was too hungry to do it justice. Also a full mouth kept him from having to tell how come the glider flight in the wet suit.

But Viron soon switched from the hearth to the world and held forth on princes and powers, and John had only to listen and nod. He sat back bloated. Viron took it for weariness.

"I'm afraid we've bored you half to death with our childish quarrel and our foolish chatter. You'll be wanting to go to bed. Stegmas."

The giant Stegmas wheeled him from Viron's hard handshake and Evridiki's long look. John's cabin had an adjoining head, and Stegmas waited for him to wash up and clean his teeth with a guest brush and empty his bladder. Then Stegmas helped him off with his robe and tucked him in tenderly.

He waited for darkness and stillness. He got out of bed and onto his good foot. It would take grit, and his teeth were already supplying the need. But as he took the first hopping steps, he found that what he had to fear was expectation of pain rather than pain itself. And when he made it to the bulkhead, he found that leaning against the bulkhead helped slide his weight along. The cast was more annoyance than hindrance.

He cracked his door open. The passageway seemed empty. He swung himself out into it and, creticking along toward the nearest companionway, listened past his own noises for those of others.

The banisters helped lift him

LICENSED TO UNL.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

up the companionway steps. As he neared the top he heard a creaking. He stretched carefully for a look on deck. The creaking came from the leather gun belt as Stegmas's stomach went in and out.

Stegmas lay snoring gently in a deck chair. John swung himself upward. He stubbed his plaster toe on the next-to-last tread and winced. At the noise, Stegmas's snore took on a snarl. John froze a moment, then set foot on the top step. The tread creaked. At the noise, Stegmas's snore deepened in ferocity. John crouched down out of sight. But Stegmas's sleeping mind apparently subsumed the creaking under that of his belt.

Just as John was about to move on up again, Stegmas shifted in the chair and the creaking stopped. At the silence, Stegmas's snore choked off. Stegmas started awake, listened, heaved his heavy body lightly out of the chair, and moved toward the head of the companionway.

John swung himself down by the banisters. Stegmas's feet reached the head of the companionway before John reached the foot, but John was around the bend of the passageway before Stegmas's head lowered to look down. He heard Stegmas start down. There was a long stretch of corridor to John's cabin. He shoved inside the first door that opened to his hand.

Evridiki sat at her dressing table almost forehead to forehead with herself, frowning at her frown. She stared at him without turning around or making a move to cover herself.

"You fool."

He felt a fool.

Her stare softened.

"You poor brave boy."

He felt a poor brave boy.

She rose turning and came to him.

Melas leukos, leukos melas. Black white, white black. The answer to that riddle had been himself. Another answer was dolphin. Another, time: night and day. And now he thought of another, Odysseus's mysterious plant moly: the black root and the milky flower that won Kapetanios Odysseus the love of the sorceress Circe. The scholars looked in the wrong place for that plant when they looked for it in Linnaeus or in Mother Earth.

Evridiki's giggle brought him out of his bemusement.

"He is right, you know. We both pretend. He pretends to be angry with me for being jealous of his mistresses; that is so he can be free to take care of some deal that has come up. And I pretend to be jealous of his mistresses though I know his only real mistress is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

business; that is so when we make up he will buy me that pearl or something just as nice."

She gave a start. "What day is this? I have to take care not to make up on the wrong day. Harry Winston, Tiffany, and Cartier aren't open on Sunday." She toyed with the Cardinal's ring. "That is a nice ring. It looks like a good jewel."

"It's yours." He took it off and put it on her thumb. "Would that deal you spoke of have to do with DBC? You both were at the opening, and so he must take some interest in it."

"That's right, you were there when that poor girl died. It must have been horrible." She shuddered. "Let's talk about something else." She displayed the jewel to herself. "Thank you. I think I will have it set in a pendant." She frowned at it. "I am not really jealous, because I am not really afraid of losing him to any other woman, but I wonder what he sees in that Varvara."

He took a guess. "Varvara Tambouris?"

"You know her?" She seemed more surprised at having spoken her thought than at his knowing.

"I only know she works for DBC."

"Yes, he keeps her in that setting to be his eyes and ears there."

"So he does have an interest in DBC?"

"He is DBC. But who wants to talk business now."

They did not talk business any more.

He had another reason now to get away from Viron Kontos's yacht and Viron Kontos's island and out of Viron Kontos's life. Viron Kontos's wife. It would be hard to face Viron again. At dinner, and indeed in his demeanor from the start, Viron had shown a persona John found charismatic.

John did not move but he sat up inside himself. If Viron owned DBC, no wonder he had turned on the charm and the hospitality. Viron had even more motive than Major Anagnostis and Kostis Dimitriou to find the key. John shook his head. Everyone thought John DeFoe had the key. Even Al had thought so.

What about Evridiki? Was she part of the hospitality? He spat that thought from his mind. But what about Evridiki? What was she thinking now, if she ever had thoughts other than thoughts about her looks and adornments to her looks?

Evridiki had closed her eyes and appeared to have withdrawn into sleep or thought. Yet the cant of her head showed she remained

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

aware of her surroundings. He had been wondering about her willingness to give herself to him so quickly and recklessly. Now her listening spoke the answer. He had the feeling that she lay ready.

If she heard footsteps pause outside her door, she would scream rape. He saw she had taken care to hide the ring away. It had been awkward with the cast, but he believed he had satisfied her. If not, how to leave her now without angering her into screaming rape?

She rolled toward him. He closed his eyes. She sat up and touched him. He opened his eyes. She smiled seriously into them.

"You must go. He went up to the house with most of his people to see how the work is going, but he will be back soon."

"I hate leaving you."

She put her finger to his lips. A minatory glance, a pacifying wink. "I know, poor boy. But you must go."

The door closed behind him before she could have had time to see if he headed back toward his cabin.

He still did not know aft from forward. He did know which companionway Stegmas was guarding. He stood at the foot of it and heard Stegmas hawk and stride to the rail and spit into the water. He made his way back past Evridiki's door. He heard Viron's voice hail Stegmas and Viron's footsteps start down the other companionway. He looked for an in.

No Evridiki again. This time she would scream rape for sure. He tried another door, slipped into darkness. If he got out of this alive, he would really pay for what he was doing to his leg. The doctor must have jabbed his leg full of painkiller; his leg didn't bother him, elephantiasis aside; it did its job as well as the other.

Viron's footstaps stopped at another cabin and went in. John listened to this cabin, heard no breathing, and chanced the lights. The radio shack. No, it had to be Viron's office away from office. Touch-tone telephone, teleprinter, speaker, CRT screen. He sat down at the desk and pressed a button. The screen lit up and stock prices passed in review. London, New York, Tokyo. He pressed another button. News bulletins printed themselves out. Economics, politics, gossip.

One button had no label. He pressed it. Over the speaker came the Pythia's voice. She was answering one suppliant's question, and then another's. Since the shrine would have closed for the night, these consultations would be on tape. The names that the suppliants gave were names of people high in finance and public office. But he did not listen to their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

problems or the Pythia's advice.

He listened to the Pythia's voice, and grave chills fingered his spine like an instrument.

You know it already, only you do not knw you know it.

He knew now that he knew more than he wanted to know.

He fixed his mind on the cassette among Andrew's effects. The songs of Debussy. If you said the name the right way, you might be saying DBC. Andrew could not have escaped the association. What was that one of Debussy's songs that Andrew habitually whistled or hummed three notes from? *La Flûte de Pan.* He heard them in his head. If only he had Andrew's perfect pitch.

He pressed the talk switch and the Delphi connection and softly whistled the three notes over and over. On the ninth or tenth try the speaker came alive.

"At your service, Mr. DeFoe. This is the DBC computer speaking."

It caught him dry. He found his voice. "I'm John DeFoe."

"I know. Andrew fed me recognition patterns of your voice against the time you found the key. I must say it has been very frustrating waiting. But this is real time at last and this is how things stand: Lord Andrew and Lady Cora are dead. I'd advise you to leave the yacht at once."

"I would have long since if I didn't have this damn broken leg."

"You don't have a broken leg."

Some brain. "Then what's a cast doing on my leg?"

"Viron Kontos had his doctor put it on to immobilize you."

"How do you know?"

"I monitor all phone calls. I heard —"

"Excuse me. All?"

"All. May I go on?"

Some brain. *"Parakalo."*

Efkharisto. I heard Viron Kontos call his doctor and tell him to fly from Athens to the island with materials for a cast, though not to bother with preparing to handle a break. He also told the doctor to bring along a supply of Sodium Pentothol."

"Then they did try to get the key out of me."

"That would be my conclusion."

"It sure would. It would be the conclusion of all freethinking."

"I think I understand. You are twisting my words."

"The fate of every great prophet's words."

"Efkharisto."

"Parakalo."

"Any orders, Mr. DeFoe?"

"Yes. No. I have to sign off now." He had heard the doorknob turn. Loudly he closed the phone conversation the Greek way. "Kisses." He turned to face Viron.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I hope you don't mind. I wanted to let a friend know I'm all right and in good hands."

"My pleasure. I thought to look in on you to see how you slept, but you were not in your bed."

"I couldn't sleep for thinking this friend of mine might be worrying about me."

"Very thoughtful of you. But there's no need for lying to each other. You've found out my secret and I've found out yours. To my shame, I had to find out by stooping to a keyhole. You have my admiration for holding out under the drug."

John waved that away. "I'm not sure I know your secret. Merely that you own DBC?"

"I have a dream." Viron tapped his temple. "Here in the attic. If enough people from all over the world come to trust the Delphic Oracle, it will grow to be the unifying force the world has always needed and never had. You don't smile but I know what you're thinking. The world already has a UN and it is a debating society. But I tell you the first UN was at Delphi. You have heard of the Amphictyonic League? It was a real unifying force till it grew corrupt. But you do not want to hear my dream. It is time for our own dreamless sleep. Stegmas."

Stegmas came in, gun in hand. It was a small gun in Stegmas's hand, but it was a big gun.

"You know what to do, Stegmas. Like the older DeFoe."

Stegmas nodded, not taking his eyes or the gun off John.

Viron spoke to John reasonably, man-to-man.

"If we have to shoot, we will shoot. All the others are up in the servants' cottages with the rest of the night off and plenty of good ouzo to celebrate their return to the island and their families after a long cruise. Not that they will ask questions if they hear shots and you turn up missing. They are loyal to my money."

He went on while unbuckling and unlooping his belt. "Some may call it fate, but we make our own fate. Surely you don't think it's an accident your heading here. Somwhere in your mind was the knowledge that my island lay here. Unconsciously you wanted to come here. Or something drew you here. Freud knew. Dark things loom in us."

Viron's pants had a hip-hugging and belly-flattening waistband; the belt was only form. Stegmas held the gun on John while Viron strapped John's arms to his sides.

"Of course, Freud had another grind to ax. Naturally, by this 'grind' I mean the sailors' name for a kink in a rope, and by this 'ax' I mean Freud's use of Occam's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

razor to cut the Gordian knot." The strap was tight. "I have a theory that Freud developed his theory of the Oedipus complex mainly to explain the birth and growth of anti-Semitism, Judaism being the father of Christianity. This would also explain Mariolatry, hyperdulia. Kill the father and marry the mother. But I'm talking you to death again."

Stegmas holstered his gun. Then one huge hand clamped over John's mouth; the other arm went around John's waist and lifted him effortlessly, and Stegmas carried him out and down the passageway. John looked back over the hairy hand. He watched Viron listen at Evridiki's door, take out a key, quietly lock the door, then pocket the key and follow them. They took a turning and passed through swinging doors.

This was the galley. Before John could take in much of anything, he found himself heading for a tank of sea water, likely for keeping lobsters and eels alive and well, that stood in a corner. Then he took in a noseful and mouthful of sea water.

He fought in love of life as heavy hands held his head under. Then, as the membrane came into play and he breathed oxygen in, he fought in sham love of life. At last he let himself go limp.

Stegmas was making sure. John counted the seconds and minutes after limpness. Stegmas held his head under a full five minutes. Then the push became pull, and his head came out, and Stegmas stretched him on the floor, turned him over, and unstrapped the belt. Nose on the floor, John kept his eyes shut and lay limp and still and let the water drool out.

Viron spoke to Stegmas in Greek. "I'm proud of him. He fought hard. Wipe the belt dry, you idiot. I can't wear it wet. Good. Now remember what happened, Stegmas. The young man heard that the major from the KYP is on the way to pick him up for questioning in the girl's death at Delphi. He evidently tried to escape in the tender. But, burdened as he was with the cast, he fell into the sea and drowned. You fished him out and gave him mouth-to-mouth — oh, you like that, do you? — but it was too late."

John played dead meat while Stegmas gathered him up and carried him up on deck. The night breeze made him want to shiver in his soaked pajamas. Stegmas set him down and began to straighten. John came to life and sat up.

Before Stegmas could do more than suck wind and turn half away, John drove stiff fingers at the ilium. The jab sent the off-balance

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Stegmas sprawling. John was on his feet before Stegmas could push to his. He swung his cast-sheathed leg against the man's head. He felt something give inside the cast, but something gave also in the skull, and Stegmas lay still. He took Stegmas's gun and gave him another hard blow on the skull with the butt. For Andrew.

He made his way down the companionway and along the passageway to Viron's office. He hobbled badly and painfully now but tried to hobble quietly. He opened the door. Viron sat at his desk, facing sideways to push a button, Rose Mary Woods fashion. A reel of tape finished rewinding, and Viron punched the play button.

"Stegmas, I told you never —"

Viron turned with a frown and froze.

John pointed the gun to encourage the freeze.

"Sorry to be dripping all over your rug."

Then he heard his own breathing and his nine or ten tries at hitting the notes from *La Flûte de Pan.* Then the try that worked. It worked again. The DBC computer came on again through the speaker, talking over its own recorded voice on the tape.

"At your service, Mr. DeFoe."

"No time to talk now. I'll call you later. From a phone in Delphi."

"All right, Mr. DeFoe. I'll be waiting." It clicked off.

Viron shook his head at the gun. "No, Yanni, we can —"

His hand crept to a drawer. John squeezed off a shot. It slammed Viron back in his chair and stained his chest red. Viron shook his head like a bull prettily ribboned for the sword. His eyes burned and his fingers gripped the desk edge to pull him to his feet. John emptied the gun. For Andrew. For Cora. For himself. The laugh lines twisted in Viron's face and he was dead and dripping on the rug.

Maybe the others would not ask questions if Viron or Stegmas had fired the shots, but the shots were sure to bring someone down for a furtive look. And now John heard Evridiki bang and scream. That would bring them.

But he took time to wipe the tape. And to ransack Viron's desk and wallet for money. Viron needed only an obol for Charon, but John DeFoe needed money for passage in this world. He found some. But, as he had expected, a billionaire did not leave much cash lying loose.

When he reached the deck, they were coming down from the compound on the hill, flashlights sweeping the way. He spent another moment fitting the gun to Stegmas's hand. Then he was at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the brass rail, down the ladder to the tender, and casting off.

Wind, salt, and sun had burned the green of the seaward slope gray. Death had burned the green of his youth gray. He had sunk the tender a mile offshore and swum underwater to the gravelly beach. He felt as though he had boiled eggs in his shoes. His gait, though, was a slow limp. He had no shoes. He found a broken car among the wrack and used a stone to hammer its splinters off. With this for a cane he hobbled inland.

Resting under a tree by a stream, he broke the cast apart. The bones felt whole. But he found swelling and discoloration. It looked like a sprain. He'd have to get treatment for it sooner or later. Meanwhile, it was good to let the cold water wash over it.

He drew his feet from the water into the shadow of the tree and shook himself out of his doze. Someone was coming. He watched a peasant shut eyes and lips and make the sign of the cross before fording the stream. Streams and even dry washes were the haunts of Nereids. The peasant did not see him till he spoke.

The man stared at him and his torn pajamas and bare feet and made the sign of the cross again. Then John sneezed and the man smiled and said, "Health to you."

John went with the man to his hut and shared his food and bought his spare clothes and shoes. The man did not want to take John's money.

Both shoes had been loose to start with, but he had to stop and find a sharp stone and slit the shoe on the bad foot. He headed west, keeping to the least traveled trails. He did not know where he was or how far he had gone when he heard the chopper. He made the cover of a cypress before the chopper hove over the hill. He waited till its beat died away over the next hill.

The way grew wilder and bleaker. He hoped that what he was following was a donkey track. Goat tracks led only to cliffs. He met a boy with a forked stick and a stone and a flerd? hock? of sheep and goats.

He asked the boy about the way.

"A donkey track, by your leave."

Before he was out of sight and out of hearing, the boy took out a flute and played a tune John had never heard and yet knew.

He heard the chopper again the next afternoon and again took cover. It had to be the same chopper. It had the same KYP

ELIZABETH O. UNZBERG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sign. And this time it swooped so low that he could swear he saw Major Anagnostis beside the pilot.

He met a woman with child. Because his head was already bare, he bowed. To greaten politeness he wished the woman a good confinement.

She blushed and looked down with a smile as she spoke.

"Go toward the good. Go toward the good."

To meet a woman with child was a good omen. It meant your journey would bear fruit.

It bore fruit. The way grew familiar.

He heard the chopper. Here there was no cover. Fear winged his heels as he made for a pile of stones. His heart thudded in his ears long after he had stopped his limping run. Sweat filmed his eyes and stuck his clothes to his skin. He bent to pick up a stone in either hand and turned to stand and face the chopper.

The loud hailer's voice was the voice of Major Anagnostis.

"David at least had a sling. Or maybe you think you're James Bond?"

"No, Julian Bond."

The major must have seen his mouth move, but of course the major could not hear him.

"What? No matter. We found the wreck of the tender and picked up your trail. It ends here. Drop the stones."

John hurled one and missed, then the other and hit. There was a slight starring of the plexiglass bubble. The chopper tilted out of range and hovered. John turned and bent as though to grab two more stones.

The loud hailer laughed.

"Give up, DeFoe. Admit you have met your nemesis."

John's hands dug under the stones and closed on the Kalashnikov assault gun. A choice between giving up to Major Anagnostis and taking a chance the gun had not clogged up was no choice. But one burst, if it fired, would be all he had.

He brought the gun around into sight and pulled the trigger.

A tourist's belligerent belly prodded John.

"Keep it moving, son."

The tourist had paid for the sun and wasn't about to let this underground shrine business, no matter how atmospheric, hold him up too long.

They had done a good job of repairing the corridor leading to the shrine and the inner shrine itself; quickening, he followed the flash of neon arrow-flight. Then he was in the Pythia's presence.

"Your name?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"John DeFoe."

The Pythia grew tauter.

"Your question?"

"Is the soul of Xenia Leandros happy?"

He made out glistenings under the veil. But her tears were raindrops on a statue.

"The brain does not feel pain, Kyrios Yanni, but it knows pain. The psyche does not feel happiness or unhappiness, but it knows happiness or unhappiness."

Under the veil and under the wild black wig that made Xenia the Pythia, Xenia was the Pythia, even after the shock he had just given her. Was she that good an actress, or were she and the Pythia akin under the skin? Maybe her aim in taking the idiot savant's place had been to subvert the Delphic Oracle and undermine the junta, but she had got so into the part that she believed herself the true Pythia delivering true oracles.

He'd give Xenia the benefit of the doubt; her plan hadn't been for the idiot savant to die but for the boom man to spirit her away, just as the blast wasn't to destroy the DBC computer but to create diversion for the switch.

A light blinked. His time was up.

He walked out blindly, then stopped abruptly face-to-face with Idi Cardinal Naluji. No, it was a younger, lighter mask than the cardinal's face. His own.

At the turn you faced a wall of polished marble. The cardinal must have missed seeing that mirroring surface on leaving the shrine that opening day. Could the Pythia's message to the cardinal — that he should give his "holy nothingness" to the first black man he saw on leaving the shrine — have signified tonsure, admonishing the cardinal, who dreamt of becoming the first black pope, to be humble as when he became a cleric?

John looked in the mirroring surface and sprang his fingers open in the image's face. To give a man the *moundza* was to put the curse of blindness on the man. The cardinal had been blind. He had been blind. He remembered the cardinal facing him and giving him the ring. He remembered Viron's look. Viron had not been blind.

I'm 'proud of him. He fought hard.

Face frozen, John made to turn back to the Pythia. But there was no turning back. Not because the fat tourist would raise a fuss if John broke in on the private consultation. Xenia would not know. There was one who might know.

He limped into the sunlight. No doubt KYP agents mingled with the crowd, but maybe he had been Major Anagnostis's personal prey.

LICENSED TO [illegible]
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

At least no eye or hand seized hold of him. Hard by the souvenir stands bearing models of Apollo's temple and phials of gas guaranteed to have seeped through the fissure in the shrine floor, he found a pay phone.

This time it took fewer tries to hit the right notes.

"At your service, Mr. DeFoe. Welcome to Delphi."

"Thanks. Are we alone?"

"Pragmatically or existentially?"

"Pragmatically."

"Yes. The junta has put a standing tap on all pay phones, but I have nullified this one."

"Good. Am I the son of Viron Kontos and ... I don't remember the name, but she's the sister of Idi Cardinal Naluji."

"Dalili, daughter of Mali's one-time ambassador to Greece. Dalili lives in Bamoko, is married, and has six children. Viron Kontos is the late Viron Kontos. The evidence is circumstantial, but I deduce that Dalili did have an affair with Viron and bore his child in secret and disposed of it in the orphanage that was your earliest home." At John's long silence; "Will you want me further, sir?"

"Yes and no."

"I'm a computer, sir, and in my language it is either yes *or* no."

"You're also supposed to be the brains behind the Delphic Oracle when I set you loose. And an oracle is by definition ambiguous."

"True, sir. Forgive me for failing to live up to my programming. In extenuation, I haven't had much practice."

"Don't worry. You'll catch on. What I meant by yes and no was that I don't want you at the moment, but I will be wanting you again. Till then, I'll be trying to find out what it is I want to ask you. In the meanwhile you might be doing a few chores."

"Tell me, sir, tell me."

"You might do what you can to louse up the transactions of Varvara Tambouris and Kostis Dimitriou. And you might whisper forewarning in the Pythia's ear whenever the junta is about to move against the underground. For your information, the junta is bad. Not that the Pythia is wholly good. But then no one is totally good. Got that?"

"I catch on, sir."

"And you might be working out a way of contacting a spaceship now on its way from Earth to Alpha Phoenicis. I'd like to send a message. 'Bon voyage.' Better say it in Greek; otherwise, it'll be Greek. Got that?"

"Yes and no, sir."

"Call me Jack."

"All right, Jack."

He limped away without looking back. He began to smile.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Of the five "best" anthologies on hand, four purport to be a selection of the best science fiction stories published during the preceding year. Together they present 45 stories, an essay (originally included as an Afterword to one of the numerous 'original' anthologies), and five poems.

Now there are supposedly a few readers who are rolling in money, and I'm sure they won't hesitate a second to send the chauffeur skedaddling down to the book store to pick up copies of all the books. Later, when slumming with their eccentric friends at weirdo events like science fiction conventions, they can ever-so-casually drop authors' names and story titles to prove they are *in the know*. Never question these people too closely about their knowledge of science fiction; their bodyguards are always nearby, ready to unobtrusively crowd the overinquisitive away from the conversation and, likely, out of the room entirely.

On the other hand there are the poor and the pennypinching (not necessarily the same people) who expect one of these anthologies to cull the hundreds of sf stories published annually and truly give them the best of the lot. Most of these people seek the editor(s) whose taste coincides with their own and settle down for a good

RICHARD DELAP

Books

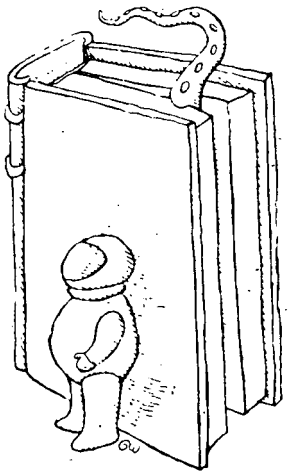
The Best Science Fiction of the Year #3 edited by Terry Carr, Ballantine, $1.50

The 1974 Annual World's Best SF edited by Donald A. Wollheim with Arthur W. Saha, DAW, $1.25—

Best Science Fiction Stories of the Year, Third Annual Collection edited by Lester del Rey, E. P. Dutton & Co., $7.95

Best SF: 1973 edited by Harry Harrison and Brian W. Aldiss, G.P. Putnam's Sons, $6.95 (paper: Berkley, $.95)

The Year's Best Horror Stories: Series II edited by Richard Davis, DAW, $1.25



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

read, secure in the knowledge that they know what to expect. Some of these people may be happy with their choice, but are they reading the year's "best," really?

There is also the matter of popular stories. The Hugo and Nebula award winners and runners-up can provide a guide so that we may judge the editor by how many stories included in his anthology went on to capture prizes. This lets the reader skip effortlessly along the path of popular opinion...but what about all those terrific stories that over the years have proved themselves both popular and influential and have never even been mentioned for an award (e.g. Thomas M. Disch's "The Asian Shore," and Robert Silverberg's "Sundance")?

The reader looking for a worthy collection of the previous year's best sf stories must therefore, it seems, bring with him a prerequisite knowledgeableness of popular opinion, or of a specific editor's proven ability, or a pocketful of money. But if you are one of those rare birds who allow critics to make your choice, then take my word for it that you're selecting wisely if you buy the Terry Carr anthology.

Mr. Carr has now produced three annual 'best' collections since he and Wollheim split after co-editing the successful Ace series, *World's Best Science Fiction,* for seven years. This year's volume is by far the best of either series. It includes Harlan Ellison's Hugo-winning "The Deathbird," Vonda N. McIntyre's "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand" and Gene Wolfe's "The Death of Doctor Island," both Nebula winners, Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas," also a Hugo-winner, and James Tiptree Jr.'s "The Women Men Don't See," published in this magazine at the end of 1973 and gathering nominations for this year's Nebula like spilled honey gathers flies.

These five stories seem to me seminal works of modern science fiction, portending the directions the genre will take in the near future and reflecting the astonishing variety by which sf is attracting more new readers than ever before in its relatively short history.

Harlan Ellison, a capricious, self-indulgent writer with so much talent he often simply throws it away just to clear up the atmosphere a bit, reaches one of his recurrent peaks of brilliance in "The Deathbird," an electrically-charged current of emotion that runs AC/DC, hitting direct with cleverly intrinsic asides (multiple-choice questions, an essay, a short story-within-a-story), then in direct as we realize that the story's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

primary thrust of symbolism, Man and his relationship with God, is sneaking up to us in strange new guises. It helps us realize that many of the symbols we accept automatically in both science fiction and mainstream are ready for some quickchange artistry, and that science fiction and fantasy are the only adequate means of making these changes. It provides insight so that we can leap on hurdles that keep so many book publishers printing those worn-out ideas that should have been discarded years ago. This story shows us it can be done, and after reading it one finds it hard to settle for anything less.

Of course, just when we've decided that we can no longer accept the traditional type of story, we come upon Vonda N. McIntyre's marvelous "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand," presenting a desert world with pocket settlements of humans struggling to survive a harsh environment and developing customs to meet their needs. Although the plot and background are bread-and-butter common in sf terms, McIntyre lifts her story from the tar-pits of conservatism with her complex characters, in particular Snake, a woman named for her medical methods that involve the use of live snakes and their venom. McIntyre proves that the traditional turf, while familiar, is not yet completely exhausted if the writer knows how it should be cultivated.

Gene Wolfe's "The Death of Doctor Island" confines three characters in an isolated environment, an artificial satellite orbiting Jupiter, elaborating the problems of the individual who, even when understanding the larger goals of society, knows and fears what must be personally lost in the realization of those goals. The characters' strange actions are prodded by the remarks of a fourth "character," Doctor Island, the voice of the satellite itself, intricately programmed by the author to drive the plot forward on a rushing tide of suspense. The story is a successful fusion of techniques, the old-fashioned "inner space," proving indubitably that the two methods are not, as some critics insist, mutually incompatible.

Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" breaks all the rules of fiction writing, and does so beautifully. The story has no characters (only symbols), has no plot beyond philosophical tenets, and has no place or setting beyond the amorphous beauties of the city of Omelas, which Le Guin suggests the reader adjust to suit his or her own idealized visions. Readers who scream this isn't a story will be dead wrong, for this is the ultimate in springboard science fiction, where the imagination of the reader

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

must embellish the old sf bugaboo, idea-as-story. Omelas is that lively but uncertain vision in the back of our brain, the beautiful but not quite Utopian ideal, controlled by something dark, shameful, hidden away in a cramped room of horror. It is a test that allows us to reexamine our religious and political leanings (one and the same?) — do we remain in our mental niche and accept Omelas, flaws and all, or do we join the ones who walk away, the ones who mysteriously "seem to know where they are going"? The emotional "symptoms" Le Guin wrenches from our gut are devastating, frightening, and powerful pragmatism edged by the challenge of the unknown. This is not light escapist fare, but serious speculation, surely one of the most memorable short stories ever to appear in the sf genre.

"The Women Men Don't See" is a brilliant paradoxical story in which James Tiptree, Jr. hones his remarkable talent to such a fine edge that it cuts through the contemporary philosophical muddle with a deadly hush. Women who cry out that modern sf does not recognize their sex as anything but bitches and/or love objects will have to shut up where this story is concerned, properly chastised by the fact that few (if any) female sf authors have ever given women the prominence or depthful characterization that Tiptree gives here with little fuss and seeming ease. Two men and two women, stranded in Yucatan by a plane crash, chatter their way through a waiting game with bright inventive dialogues that consistently branch out in wildly exploratory directions. The reader becomes breathless, altering his anticipations with every page, until at the end he realizes that the intelligent ones among us, of both sexes, are those who take quick advantage of those sudden brief openings in the chess-like game of life. Tiptree focuses on the movements of the Queen (representing Woman) in this tricky strategy, and the intricate play should make some of the readers of the Lib movement curl up in shame when they see that a man recognizes their ambitions better than they do themselves.

Carr's remaining selections are mostly very good suppport., R. A. Lafferty's "The World as Will and Wallpaper" is an energetic trip through a world-spanning city by a rebel who doesn't even know he's rebelling. Philip José Farmer's "Sketches Among the Ruins of My Mind" depicts humanity's gradual loss of memory and is entertaining in spite of the political treatise that heaves its way into the story's conclusion. Robert Silverberg's "Breckenridge and the Continuum" is a sleek showmanish dog

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

paddle through the sea of space and time, an ego-search springing from the human creation of (and reaction to) myth. Alfred Bester's "Something Up There Likes Me" concocts a snap-crackle-pop comedy about an intelligent Orbiting Biological Observatory with a mischevious desire to meddle in human affairs. F. M. Busby's "Tell Me All About Yourself" is an occasionally effective story about necrophilia, but lacks both the background and motivational detail needed to give it real power. And Jack Vance's "Rumfuddle" weaves through a jumble of alternate worlds, passways through time, and various sf-nal magic acts geared to divert us while Vance sets up his final hat-trick and paints his rabbit a startling purple (which is great, but you have to like purple rabbit hat-tricks to appreciate it).

Carr's anthology is indicative of the current state of science fiction, and proves a wise selection of stories knowingly chosen also for their value as entertainment — which, after all, is what fiction is all about.

Donald Wollheim seems to agree with my statement above, mentioning in the introduction to his volume that science fiction is "first and foremost a form of reading entertainment." After that, however, Wollheim goes all to pieces trying to discredit the humans-in-scaly-skins we often academic interest in the genre, sneering at the anthologies of original stories (one story he credits to a magazine actually appeared in an anthology in 1970, which doesn't say much for Wollheim's research), and foolishly attempting to deny the undeniable worth of Brian Aldiss' history of science fiction, *Billion Year Spree,* because he disagrees with Aldiss' definition of science fiction (I mean, really, talk about *nits*...).

In selecting stories for his anthology, Wollheim calls the year "transitional" and feels that "no really different pattern has emerged," which may surprise those readers who find Harlan Ellison's "The Deathbird" making a second appearance here. Wollheim's weakness as an editor is that he tries to resist the changes happening in the field today. When he likes a story that signals these changes (as does the Ellison story), he simply includes it, calls it "New Wave" writing, and studiously ignores the implications of that classification.

This schizoid approach to editing is bound to produce an odd assortment of stories. Looking at the best side we find Michael Bishop's "Death and Designation Among the Asadi," an impressive view of an alien civilization that is light-years away from the weary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

find posing as "alien," Robert Sheckley's "A Suppliant in Space" is a delightful spoof of humanized aliens, stuffed with comic wisecracks as the aliens make contact with a real human. R. A. Lafferty's "Parthen," which for some inexplicable reason has been included in three of these anthologies, is a mildly amusing but cranky snipe at the Women's Lib movement. Gordon Eklund's "Moby, Too," E. C. Tubb's "Evane," and Vadim Shefner's "A Modest Genius" are short tales, pleasant enough but by no means a defensive example of the year's best.

The remainder is a dismal group. Norman Spinrad's "Weed of Time" shouldn't even be here because of its 1970 publication date. Clifford Simak's "Construction Shack," which is repeated in another anthology, is an absurd, implausible story which says that Pluto is a giant ball of steel. And Frederik Pohl and Jack Williamson's "Doomship," a portion of their novel *Farthest Star,* is an unbelievably dreadful spaceship story packed with delaying tactics that tell us how life is lived on the ship but don't advance the plot in the slightest.

If Wollheim seems confused and unable to acknowledge change, Lester del Rey makes a point of mentioning that science fiction, by its very nature, instills in its readers a "habit of mental flexibility toward change" — not to mention the fact that, thankfully, "it's still fun!"

Unfortunately del Rey's book is much too cautious. Mental flexibility seems to have eluded him entirely, and his book, while quite readable, has a chary, middle-of-the-road slant unsuitable to this sort of anthology.

The Lafferty, Bester and Simak stories are repeated here, along with some conservative diversions by Thomas N. Scortia, George R. R. Martin, Edward Wellen, Theodore R. Cogswell (who has two stories included, one written with Ted Thomas under an unsecret pseudonym), Michael Kurland, and Frederik Pohl. (Pohl's contribution is an afterword to another Anthology, reprinted here because del Rey found it "irresistible" — which might be okay if it were really that good. It's not.) Stories by Norman Spinrad, Poul Anderson, and Robert F. Young are all minor works, each upholding del Rey's notion that excellent short fiction is hard to find.

The book's best story, the only one that comes close to the quality we expect in this kind of book, is Kate Wilhelm's "Whatever Happened to the Olmecs?," which dangles the reader tantalizingly between the uncertain (has the man really been in contact with aliens?)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the unmistakable (the government is going, going...) as the suspense mounts with inexorable sureness.

If del Rey should be called a conservative editor, Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss should be called gadfly liberals. Yet, oddly, the Harrison/Aldiss book doesn't shape up to any higher quality than del Rey's; it is, in fact, almost desperate in its incaution and grapples with scattershot items that are neither cohesive nor of consistent high quality.

The editors have managed to shove one surprise winner into their bag of tricks, and they wisely leave it on top (i.e., the first story in the book) so that readers might spot it first and buy impulsively. That surprise is William Harrison's "Roller Ball Murder," which was snapped up for the movies soon after its appearance in *Esquire* magazine. Mr. Harrison has a solid mainstream reputation, and it is a pleasure to welcome him into sf with this zesty story of the next century, when corporations have assumed control of everything, giving the public a release valve for their repressed anger with a world-televised violent sport. The horror of this world is reflected in the reminiscences of Jonathan E, the world's star roller ball player, now ageing and worried as the rules of the sport are continually amended to increase the game's deadly carnage. Harrison's writing is stark and brutal, perfectly matched to his subject matter, creating what I feel to be the finest sf sports story ever written.

Some of the authors are familiar from other volumes. R. A. Lafferty is back with "Parthen," Robert Sheckley's "Welcome to the Standard Nightmare" is another insouciant tale of a man contacting aliens, Robert Silverberg's wry but bitter "The Wind and the Rain" tells of aliens observing the wasteland of our ecological destruction, Gene Wolfe's "La Befana" is an ambiguous and eerie religious fable, Michael Bishop's "The Windows in Dante's Hell" is a sequel to an earlier story, interesting but a little thin, detailing the social attitudes permeating the domed, multileveled future city of Atlanta, and Ted Cogswell and Ted Thomas' "Early Bird" is a frothy space-opera plot so corny that one isn't sure whether to laugh or cringe.

Brian Aldiss' "Serpent Burning on an Altar" seems to be a Victorian fantasy mixed with medieval and modern elements, a strange but tasty dish best appreciated when read with its companion stories (as published in *Orbit 12*). The rest of the book, with stories by Kingsley Amis, Joe W. Haldeman, Thomas M. Disch,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Max Beerbohm, Josef Nesbadva, Tor Age Bringsvaerd, Ilya Varshavsky, and Kenneth Bernard (plus a few minor poems), is a notable look at what's being published these days, but it isn't always science fiction and it isn't always good.

Once again we meet with that customary remark, this time in Mr. Aldiss' afterword — "but fiction has to be judged as fiction or it's nothing." Judging this book as fiction, one is tempted to term it passably good and be on one's way; but as the best *science fiction* of the year, it's a long way from what we expect, what we want, or what we need.

The Richard Davis anthology of horror stories, originally published in England, concentrates on fantasy of a special sort, stories "in the modern idiom [with] the element of the Gothic" as screen star Christopher Lee informs us in his short and endearingly clumsy foreword. Like the majority of the "best" anthologies, editor Davis has managed to get his hands on at least a few gems, sparkling items that will delight lovers of the horror tale.

J. Ramsey Campbell's excellent "Napier Court" shows us no more than glimpses of the supernatural but offers a striking concept of the state of mind which leads to terror. Campbell takes us into the mind of Alma Napier so totally, so skillfully, that one is sure her rejection of the strange recurring shadows in mirrors and the darkness of the hallway is a well-defined example of sanity shining through the crushing press of emotional (often sexual) frustration. The advent of terror is gradual, subtle, its culmination brilliantly executed.

"The Events at Poroth Farm" is a grisly, scary tale by T. E. D. Klein, following a pattern of brooding events that turn grim as all living creatures at the Poroth Farm fall under a spell of "possession," a familiar horror theme

CITIES & SCENES
from the
ANCIENT WORLD
a pictorial supplement to de Camp's *Great Cities of the Ancient World*; 180 of Roy Krenkel's best drawings and sketches: now in stock -- $16.00

SCIENCE FICTION HANDBOOK,
REVISED
by LS & CC de Camp
A guide to writing fantasy & sf; newly revised & updated: scheduled for August 1975 -- -- $8.50
at bookstores or postpaid from:
Owlswick Press
Box 8243 Philadelphia PA 19101

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strengthened with a whiff of science fiction. The narrator who relates these events is a teacher preparing for the fall semester by reading Gothic-horror literature and troubled by an increasing sense of dread — due to his reading material, he thinks, which he dutifully studies and criticizes in a clever literary tour de force that Klein brings off to perfection. The author breathes new life into old Lovecraftian clichés with his uncanny ability to choose just the right modern counterparts for Lovecraft's overbusy adjectives and adverbs.

Robert Bloch's "The Animal Fair" is a clever, oblique story that lets the horror seep through like a dark flow of cold deep water, and "Haunts of the Very Rich" by T.K. Brown III traps an assortment of wealthy people at an island resort where everything goes frightening awry, a standard idea that here lacks a focus but scatters a few random chills.

The rest of the book is filled with horrors, but all the wrong sort, horrors of incompetence, horrors of banality, horrors of boredom.

Brian Lumley is represented by two stories, "David's Worm" and "Haggopian," the first a juvenile triviality about a mutated flatworm, its climax an embarrassingly crude steal from Ray Bradbury's "The Skeleton," the second a merely incompetent pastiche of the Lovecraft Chthulhu Mythos. J. Ramsey Campbell's second story, "The Old Horns," is a moody but plotless item about a wood that traps its victims in a muddy aura of paganism and pulls them down to their doom. Eddy C. Bertin's "Like Two White Spiders" is a rehash of the madman in a mental institution who really isn't mad, and Kit Pedler's "The Long-Term Residents" is a dated *Weird Tales* blend of sf and horror, its pulpish deep-dark-secret obvious to anyone who's read even a few of this type of tale. Basil Copper's "The Knocker at the Portico" mimics the madness of Poe without ever capturing the terrors of the deranged or the supernatural, and Gary Brandner's "The Price of a Demon" presents a stereotyped man and his stereotyped wife troubled by a stereotyped demon.

I'll admit my prejudice in favor of the horror story. I was weaned on Poe and Lovecraft and Bierce, and still am ever on the lookout for writers who want to turn my blood to ice water. Sad to report, then, that Mr. Davis' collection gave me an occasional thrill but dissipated the effect with servings of tapioca passed off as blood pudding. And not one story by that modern master of horror, Robert Aickman — *that* I can't forgive!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Vance Aandahl has happily been writing more fiction lately, and we're pleased to offer another superior story, this time about a man who follows a myth to the Southwest desert and finds something terrifyingly different.

Owls

by VANCE AANDAHL

As he sat in the sun, Robin Yetter measured himself. His gopher mustache, the eyes behind his eyes, a small and private smile — none of these were Navajo. But otherwise he might fool anyone. The sun had darkened his face and hands to the color of Coca-Cola, and his body was small and hard and self-contained.

He dressed Navajo too. He wore a pair of brown Sonora boots filigreed with silver wire. His Levis and workshirt were new, still crisp and dark, but five summers in the Southwest had weathered his old jean jacket down to the color of haze. A large and battered black felt hat shaded his face. It had a hatband made of dimes. He'd bought it in Window Rock from a young man named Tom Redbird.

For three hours Robin sat on the wooden porch of the grocery store, drinking cherry pop and gazing blankly between the Sinclair station and the cafe at the desert beyond. It was sand and rock and yucca, but mostly sunlight. Even the layers of dark mineral in the mesas shimmered white in the afternoon sun.

He squinted into the magnesium wasteland. Tonight, somewhere out there in that desert, the local Navajo elders would gather secretly in full dress. He knew they would begin by eating peyote. What would happen next he wasn't sure, but sometime during the night a drummer would summon the tribes of the desert owls, and the owls would come, and they would parley together, men and birds, and then they would dance. The Owl Dance. And he too would be there.

On the way out of town the road was all ruts and baked mud. Robin's old pickup shuddered over the washboarded clay, kicking clouds of dust a hundred feet high.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

After half an hour, he came to an arroyo and followed it down into the flats. Here the road was made of the same earth as the desert around it, a coarse yellow sand with fewer ruts and less dust.

He drove through the flats for another thirty minutes. Even with both windows open, the cab collected heat and held it like a cage. He whistled softly through his teeth, trying to ignore the broil. At length the road rose onto a long ridge. As he climbed the ridge, sagebrush and grass thickened until the road petered out in a stand of pinons.

Robin parked the pickup by an outthrust thumb of rock and hiked another quarter mile to the crest of the ridge. Half-hidden in a grove of scrubby junipers sat a shack, mostly adobe, some timber, its roof thatched with evergreens. Compared to the typical hogan, it was a palace. Two or three dogs were sleeping in the shade. In a ramshackle corral adjoining the house, a single saddle horse stood with its head hanging, paralyzed by the heat.

A woman stepped out of the house and watched him as he walked by. She wore a calico blouse and a full calico skirt. Her black eyes followed him step by step; he could feel them on the nape of his neck until he'd cleared the top of the ridge. He wondered if she knew about the Owl Dance. She wouldn't be there herself, of course: only the old men, the ones who still wore their hair in braids.

Ahead lay more desert. It stretched to the western mountains, and they were a long way off. Beneath the sun they seemed erased, the color of smoke, but now, as it sank beyond them, they darkened to purple.

He walked into the desert. The white dazzle faded and colors appeared. Mostly yellows and browns, some cinnamon, some black, strips of pale green, and a lone column of gold where a tall saguaro caught the last direct ray of light.

The air began to cool. The drone of insects quieted. Something moved across the sand — a big lizard, maybe a sidewinder. Something else darted overhead. He thought it might be a jay or sparrow, but it wasn't large enough to be an owl. He was looking for owls.

Hunkering on the balls of his feet, Robin waited for the moon to rise. He'd buttoned the jean jacket and thrust his hands into his Levis. Beneach a lake of stars, the desert was cold and black. He wondered if he'd even be able to see an owl.

He knew he wasn't being foolish, at least not in theory. The owl is a primary deity of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Southwest Indians because it is aggressive and fearless. While other animals run from strange noises, an owl will always fly close to investigate. That was the science of it, he knew, the tough little engine that made the magic move. And this night the owls of the desert for ten miles around would hear drums that Robin might not hear until he was half a mile away. So his plan was simple: follow an owl in.

He'd been waiting now for a long time. Probably two or three hours, though it seemed like all night.

To his left, the darkness seemed to shift. Nothing really there, he knew — just fear stirring in his stomach. He thought about fear. He couldn't ignore it, couldn't trick it out of mind. He had to learn how to sit with it, calmly.

Then he saw the owl. It appeared abruptly on a barrel cactus, ten feet in front of him. He knew it was an owl by its silhouette — two horns, two tufts, there against the lake of stars.

He stood, wanting to talk with the owl.

Trit, trit, trit — its wings opened and it glided away. It flew west in a direct line.

He watched it until it disappeared, then started after it.

He fixed his direction on a peak in the mountain range. Somewhere between him and that jumble of black skeletons on the horizon, the ceremony was readying. He walked quickly and lightly, his head forward, listening intently for the first whisper of drums on the wind.

He'd planned what to do for weeks. First he'd hear the drums; then he'd catch the glow of the campfires; then, as he came still closer, he'd be able to see each dancer and each owl moving separately, each a discrete shadow against the flames. He'd stand still then and watch for ten or fifteen minutes. Presently he'd move forward some more, slowly, not trying to hide himself. Again he'd stand still, watching. At last he'd walk to the very edge of the ceremony, slowly, entranced. He'd hunker there, motionless and observant, possessed by the spirit of the dance, until it ended. Then, later, he would walk away as he had come.

It would work. To the Navajos he would be as inobtrusive and natural as the rocks and cactus. After all, it was their own method; he'd learned it from them. If he came in the spell of the dance, they would acknowledge him and let him stay.

As he trudged out of a crooked gulch onto a flat promontory of rock, it came to him — not a sound, really, just an intuition of rhythms in the air. It came, and then, as he moved on, it came again.

LICENSED TO MEDIOG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"...whup dummer whup dummer whup dummer shup..."

For another ten or fifteen minutes the sound remained almost subliminal. It came to him for a few seconds, then went away. Robin had no way of knowing where it was, but he kept walking straight ahead toward the distant peak. He would follow the owl.

"...whup dummer whup dummer whup dummer whup..."

Suddenly the distant murmur disappeared under another sound, the whine of a motor cutting through the desert. Seconds later two headlights bobbed over a little ridge.

Robin dropped instantly. He lay flat, one cheek against the sand, watching the headlights. They bounced and jostled forward, passing no more than fifty feet to the right. Had the light touched him? He didn't know.

As the headlights passed and vanished, he could see for a second or two the form of a jeep with two men in it. He squirmed sideways in the sand, watching the jeep as it drove away.

Then the whine of the motor changed pitch, and once again the headlights jerked into view. The driver had turned the jeep around.

It came straight back, its two eyes jogging crazily. He knew immediately there was no point in running. He was already trapped in the twin cones of light.

The jeep stopped twenty feet away. The whine of the motor died. Silence returned to the desert, cold and foreboding.

They'd left the lights on. He couldn't see a thing in the blinding glare. He sat up in the sand and wondered what to do. He had an eight-inch hunting knife in his belt, but there was no sense in taking it out because he wouldn't know what to do with it. He had something else he might use first, a wooden Navajo flute. He pulled it out of his jean jacket pocket and held it up for them to see. Then, terrified and embarrassed all at once, he tooted on it.

One of them hopped out of the jeep: Robin could hear the crunch of steps in the sand. Then a figure appeared before him. At first the figure was just a black cutout against the headlights.

"Need a lift into town?"

Robin put away the flute and shaded his eyes with both hands. He could see that it was an old Navajo well into his sixties. He wore a beadwork vest over a red and blue flannel shirt, Levis, and moccasins. He also wore a hat of battered black felt, just like Robin's except that the band was made of beads, not dimes. Behind his ears, his hair hung down in two iron-gray braids.

"No...no, I'm okay."

"What're you doing out here?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm following the drums." Robin felt like a lunatic. He felt talons in his ribs.

"There aren't any drums out here. You're in the middle of a desert."

"Listen. You can hear them."

The Indian turned and looked back to where his companion must still be seated in the jeep. He lifted one hand to his head and spun the forefinger in little circles around his ear. Robin saw the hand was covered with something black, like grease or mud. There were dark smudges on his neck and jaw too, and on his clothes.

"I'm not crazy. I know what I'm doing."

"Maybe you should come back to town with us. It's cold out here, huh? You can buy a drum tomorrow."

"Look, I know what I'm doing. I'm not a tourist either. I've spent a lot of time in the desert. I'm okay." Robin wondered why they wanted to take him back to town. Maybe they knew he was close to the Owl Dance.

"Okay, suit yourself." Smiling, the old Navajo turned and stepped away. All Robin could see was the glare of the headlights. Then the motor started and the jeep backed up. A moment later it was gone.

For some time Robin stood without moving. There was no wind, and he was warm enough in the jacket, but he felt himself trembling.

Presently, though, he heard the sound again.

"...whup dummer whup dummer whup dummer whup..."

He turned, fixed his gaze on the mountains, and started walking.

At the same time the moon rose. It was full, a perfect circle mottled yellow. The sky changed from black to midnight blue, and the stars faded to individual pinholes of light.

He could see the desert now for half a mile around. Most of it was flat, but here and there stood an outcrop of rock or hill of sand, and the whole surface bristled with mesquite and catclaw and prickly pear.

The sound was louder now.

"...whup dummer whup dummer whup dummer whup..."

He reached the crest of a dune and saw something ahead, silver in the moonlight. It rose sharply into the sky. At first he thought it might be a giant saguaro, but then he realized that its lines were too straight, too angular.

He stopped and stared hard at it. Whatever it was, it wasn't an Owl Dance.

As he walked forward, it grew clearer and clearer in his sight. He began to know what it was. He felt frustrated and angry and only a little curious.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For a few hundred yards the desert sank, and the thing he was coming to disappeared from sight. But he could hear it. Louder and louder now, it whomped out its single message:

"...whup dummer whup dummer whup dummer whup..."

He climbed out of the sink onto a rim of sandstone. There it stood, right in front of him, no more than a hundred feet away.

An oil derrick.

A boring drill was lifting and falling, lifting and falling, into the earth, into the earth, again and again:

"...whup dummer whup dummer whup dummer whup..."

He brought one hand to his face and pinched his cheek until it hurt. He wanted to spin around and run away.

Then he saw the owls.

They were everywhere.

Hundreds of owls, thousands. They must have come from miles and miles around. Some were perched on rocks and cactus, but most just stood on the sandy floor of the desert.

A whole circle of owls. A few stood only forty or fifty feet from the derrick, but most of them were farther back, about as far away as he was now. Eight or nine stood right in front of him; others to either side.

They were all staring at the derrick.

He wondered why he hadn't frightened them. He stepped forward and clapped his hands.

None flew away. Two or three twisted their heads to look at him for a moment, then turned back to gaze again at the derrick.

They were entranced.

He tried to count them, but he couldn't. All he could see were their eyes, their golden unblinking eyes. He followed their eyes back to the derrick.

Up and down, up and down, lifting and falling, lifting and falling, into the earth, into the earth:

"...whup dummer whup dummer whup dummer whup..."

He stood with the owls, watching it. He watched and he watched and he watched.

It was a giant steel mantis driving its eggs into the earth.

It was fear itself, and it had its talons in his ribs.

And then he knew he couldn't move.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SIMULACRA SUBURBIA

BAIRD SEARLES

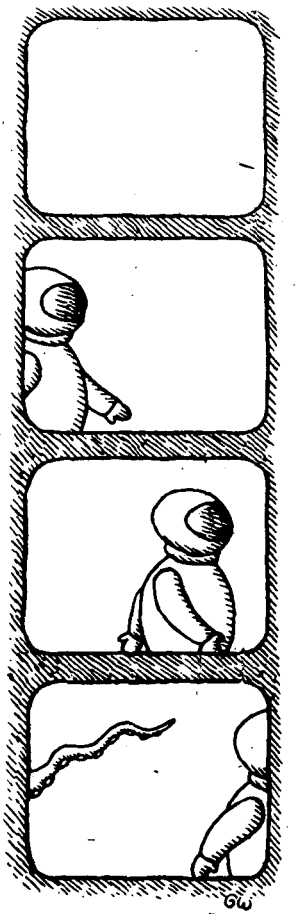
Films

The Stepford Wives is based on the novel by Ira Levin, who wrote *Rosemary's Baby*. It is one of those films one wonders as to why it was made; the best reason I can think of is that it is by Ira Levin, who wrote *Rosemary's Baby*.

I haven't read the novel, so this judgement is based entirely on the film. However, the substance there is so slight that I can't imagine the literary source being any heavier than one of those ephemeral Bradbury stories of the 50s about robots. As a drama, it would have made a solid half-hour "Twilight Zone" episode or, currently, a more stretched-out hour "special" (i.e., an hour and a half with commercials) probably starring Barbara Eden.

But here it is, nicely produced and photographed, going on for close to two hours, and as I said, one can but wonder why they took the trouble.

Joanna, her husband and her children, move from Manhattan to Stepford (Conn.?), which has none of the urban amenities of smog, blight, muggers, burglars or, for that matter, intellectual input. The last lack particularly concerns Joanna, who is a would-be photog-



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

rapher and not a suburban housewife type. Practically the minute they move in, her husband joins the local men's club, a collection of sexist oafs from Joanna's point of view.

The Stepford wives, however, are even worse. They look and act and talk like the ladies in TV commercials, concerned only with housework and satisfying their husbands sexually.

Joanna is happy to find Bobbie, a happy-go-lucky slob of a wife much more to Joanna's taste as a friend, and, later, Charmaine, a gorgeous dish who likes tennis better than housework.

The three try to start a women's conciousness-raising group; the other wives of Stepford are uninterested, but Joanna pulls a bit of genteel blackmail by agreeing to cooperate with one of the husbands in a hobby project which consists mostly of recording an extensive vocabulary list. In turn he agrees to persuade some of the wives to attend the conciousness-raising session, which turns into a total disaster since all they want to talk about is spray starch.

The three mavericks find this unnerving. Even more unnerving to Bobbie and Joanna is the sudden change in Charmaine, who has her tennis court plowed up, starts wearing frilly dresses, and worrying about *her* spray starch.

Bobbie thinks it's something in the water; they have it analyzed, but nothing shows. Then, whoops! — Bobbie goes — frilly dresses and which brand of coffee is best.

Joanna, now thoroughly frightened, goes to a shrink (female) who is cautiously sympathetic. When she returns to the house, the children are gone and her husband forces her to lock herself in her room. She sneaks out to Bobbie's; Bobby offers her a cup of coffee and continues to do so even after Joanna sticks a knife into her stomach. Bobbie casually removes it, puts it back in the rack and goes into a broken robot routine, repeating phrases and dropping cups and coffee on the floor.

Joanna, maneuvered to the men's club in search of the children, finds a replica of her room and in it, a replica of herself, who approaches her menacingly with a knotted stocking.

The film ends with a scene in Stepford's super market; all the wives, in pretty frocks and picture hats, drift about the aisles, consuming madly and smiling sweetly at each other. One of them, of course, is Joanna.

I have gone into what may be tedious detail here just to make what minor points are possible about this. For one thing, you can poke it full of holes without even thinking hard. Do all these people

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exist in a vacuum, that no one outside would notice the extreme changes in the women? The androids seem vapidly stupid, yet must be clever enough to not give away their androidness. And, as in *Westworld,* would this giant step in near-perfect robots be used only in the most limited sense, here for the satisfaction of some monstrous husbands?

On a deeper level, the assumptions are rather revolting. One, that home-making and being a good mate and parent are absolutely negative values for anyone, male or female. Two, that the sexes are so opposed and alienated that the Stepford husbands could replace their wives with "ideal" automata without the barest twinge, as they would replace their cars. Even the most rabid women's libber would hesitate to make those sweeping assertions, I'd guess.

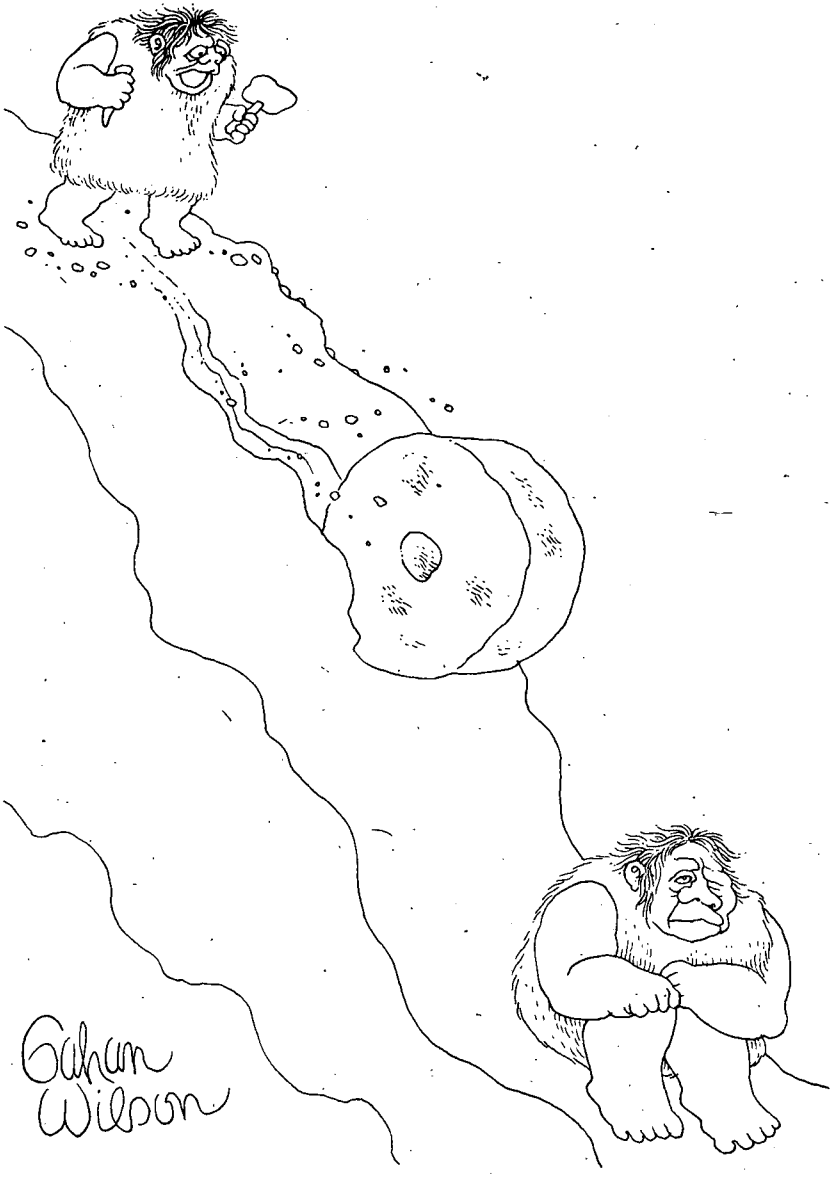
I also found myself dwelling on another "contemporary" aspect of the film — its downbeat ending. It was as predictable as any 40s B movie. In one of those, Joanna and Bobbie, or preferably, a stalwart young man, would have gone through all sorts of perilous trials and machinations, and come out triumphant, the wicked robot-makers foiled. If this modern film had ended that way, it would have been a real surprise. And darned if I wasn't hoping it might. If nothing else, it might have added some action and some interest.

I must make one positive point about *The Stepford Wives,* though a peripheral one. All the actors are perfectly competent given their limiting material, but the movie is almost worth sitting through for Paula Prentiss's performance as slobby Bobbie. Creating a character totally independent of the screenplay, she has some really great comic moments, particularly one in which a Stepford wife, arranging flowers, holds up two perfectly indentical dahlias and says to Bobbie, "Which do you prefer?" "As a matter of fact, I don't like either of them," Bobbie says with loathing. In that one throwaway line, Prentiss injects as much venom toward dahlias as ever W. C. Fields did toward children. It almost made the whole thing palatable.

Things - to - come - department...Finding myself thoroughly sick and tired of meaningful, "realistic" little movies about relevant contemporary situations, and wanting fantasies, whether authentic or simply cinematic dreams a la old MGM musicals, I am immensely cheered by two projects in the works. One I mentioned some months ago in total disbelief, but it seems that it is happening. Maurice Maeterlinck's

(*to page 153*)

DIGITIZED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



"Watch out!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In which three of sf's most distinguished practitioners consider one of the field's favorite devices and come up with a crisp and entertaining new wrinkle.

Players At Null-G

by ALGIS BUDRYS, THEODORE R. COGSWELL and TED THOMAS

The wreckage was unbelievable. A diminishing sound like the last moan of a dying banshee still vibrated in the air and made Nathaniel Wollard's teeth ache. He gingerly shook off several bricks, the plastic cover of a control cabinet, some shards of glass, a sprinkling of plastic dial covers, a section of a computer memory core, and several small branches of a pin oak. Then he sat up.

Wollard's glasses had snapped at the bridge, and the two lenses dangled by their earpieces. He held them together over his eyes and looked around in disbelief. Every building had been leveled. There wasn't even a grain of dust on the service apron of what had been the only usable hangar remaining on the old airstrip McNeil Aerospace had occupied. The hangar had been torn to pieces. Its parts, and those of the once tumble-down structures around it, were still thudding down around him. He hunched his shoulders and clasped his hands over his head, and his glasses fell apart again. His far-sightedness showed him banners of roofing felt and whirligigs of siding departing northeastward over the whipping tops of the low trees.

Nathaniel Wollard sat there, winner of the Enrico Fermi Award, the U. S. Department of Commerce Gold Medal, the Morris N. Liebman Award, the Benjamin Apthorp Gould Award, the Irving Langmuir Prize, and the NASA Exceptional Scientific Achievement Medal — he sat there and wondered what had happened. Then he remembered the others.

He jumped to his feet and began scanning the nearby rubble. "Joe," he called. "Frank, where are you?"

Within twenty feet of him, in what remained of the control center they'd established in a corner of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hangar, two piles of rubble stirred and shifted. Wollard jumped to the nearer one and swept away a piece of Celotex ceiling, some fragments of a folding chair, a clipboard whose jaws gripped only a torn end of what had been a yellow pad, a Styrofoam coffee cup with a paper clip embedded in its surface, some shards of glass, and a thick layer of dust. He hauled Joseph Barnett to his feet. Barnett, winner of the Rutherford Medal, the Guthrie Medal and Prize, the National Medal of Science, the Exceptional Civilian Service Award, the Trent-Crede Medal, the David Sarnoff Award, and the Bertram Eugene Warren Diffraction Physics Award, said, "What happened?"

"I don't know," said Wollard. "We had the car a few feet off the ground, so the gravity shield was working perfectly. Then...."

"Right," Barnett said. "We'd been drawing power for about thirty seconds, and I didn't even get a chance to shut it off. Everything built up so fast and just...exploded. What was that godawful noise?"

"And that wind?" Wollard stared over at the takeoff pad that made up the gravity shield. The old Buick was still there, but it looked like a squashed grapefruit. He groaned. "We should have thought this out more. We know better than to dive into an experiment just because somebody else might beat us to it. I told Frank that...." Suddenly aware that there were only two of them, he began to look around wildly. "Frank."

The other pile of debris shifted again. A splintered sheet of plywood fell aside and a grimy figure struggled to its feet, dislodging a section of snow fence, a circuit board, an Ozalid print, a transformer cover, some shards of glass, and an old tennis sneaker.

Wollard and Barnett finished pulling McNeil erect. His jacket and shirt were gone, and his knitted tie hung limply down his T-shirt. He looked around in disbelief at the tumbled power poles, the station wagon resting on its side with pieces of aluminum conduit punched cleanly through the underbody panels. "It's a miracle no one was killed," he said.

Barnett said, "You have any idea what happened, Frank?"

Frank McNeil, holder of the Niels Bohr International Gold Medal, the George Washington Award, the Oliver E. Buckley Solid State Physics Prize, the Nobel Prize in Physics, the Oppenheimer Memorial Prize, and the E. O. Lawrence Memorial Award, scratched his head and then shook it. "Nope. Though the car looks as if somehow the field reversed and it got hit with five hundred G's instead of zero. Which," he added hurriedly, "is not only theoretically

LICENSED TO OCLC-ISHG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impossible but wouldn't explain the rest of the destruction."

"Well," said Barnett, "let's look at this again. We got together here for a little hunting. Three nights ago over a few beers we got this idea for a grid that nullifies gravity. It's so simple we slap it together and put an old car on it to see what happens. Now this." He paused and surveyed the demolished assets of the run-down air field. "It costs us a lousy eighteen hundred dollars to build the gravity shield, and look what it's done."

Wollard said impatiently, "What I want to know is, what the hell happened? Even if the antigravity field did malfunction, it shouldn't have caused *this*. It's effective radius is only fifty feet."

"Maybe the car's gas tank exploded."

Wollard shook his head. "If it had, you could tell by looking at it. It's still in one piece, sort of. We never should have tried to beat Charles Garnett to the punch. We should have done more thinking and less building in the last three days."

"But on paper...." Barnett said weakly.

"And we couldn't afford to let Charles Garnett get ahead of us," chimed in McNeil. "He'd have skimmed the cream off the whole concept."

"Some cream," said Wollard sourly, gesturing toward the crumpled Buick. "But let's reconstruct. When we switched on the antigravity field, the car went null-G. And then all of a sudden the sky fell in. It had to be an external force."

McNeil sucked morosely on a skinned knuckle and then pointed to an approaching cloud of dust. "Hey, looks like we're going to have company."

The three turned to stare at the battered old pickup truck that was charging down the field toward them, its fenders flapping visibly and a light cloud of chicken feathers floating up from its loadbed.

"It's our landlord," groaned McNeil. "What do you want to bet he's going to claim this place was in practically commercial-airport status before we wantonly destroyed it?"

A moment later the truck screeched to an oscillating halt beside them, and the driver's door draped open.

"You boys all right?" It was Silas Whitemountain and his straw hat. "Way stuff was flying around, I figured you was all heading toward Kansas like everything else."

McNeil studied the overalled, white-haired man whose farmland adjoined the abandoned airstrip. "Guess we lucked out." And then,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thinking quickly, he added: "Well, whatever it was, you've had a lot of help in clearing off this land. It's a lot closer to being an alfalfa field than it was this time yesterday. Saved you a lot of wrecking expense."

"Pea patch sure got torn up, didn't it?" said the old man as he looked over the devastated field. "Them was valuable buildings, mighty valuable. What with inflation and all, I calculate replacement would run a good two hundred thousand. And that ain't counting the historical value. First airport in Sugwash County, this was. Lindbergh landed here once when he made his big tour after getting back from Paris."

"Must have got off course," muttered McNeil.

"Well, as a matter of fact, he did. But even so, I always figured I'd put up a marker and charge admission. Got to figure intangibles when you're collecting on tornado insurance."

"Insurance?" Wollard said. He and McNeil and Barnett looked at the old man as if hypnotized. "Oh-ho," Wollard continued. "What kind of insurance?"

"Tornado. Last thing I ever expected. Never saw one start up this season, and I've been living with the weather 'round here, man and boy, nigh on eighty years. Seen it clear as a bell from my place. Look there." He pointed up. "You can still make out the tail of it."

For the first time the trio of physicists looked up into the sky. Diminishing into the northeast was a harmless-seeming little white pigtail of a cloud. "Goin' off now," the farmer said, lowering his tendon-ridged forearm. "Sure didn't run long, but it was a heller while it lasted. Made an awful mess of your gadgets. Doesn't seem to have done your airplane much good, either. First time I've had a chance to look at it." He wandered toward the remains of the Buick, kicking litter out of his way and shaking his head.

McNeil exchanged glances with Wollard and Barnett. In a low voice he said, "I think we're off the hook. He really believes it was a tornado."

Wollard's eyes widened and a look of comprehension dawned on his face. "It *was*. By god, that's it. We turned on a tornado."

"*We* did it?" McNeil snorted. "How could we? Do you realize the forces involved? All we did was allow air mass to lift a two-ton mass ten feet in the air."

Barnett, his head tilted back to watch the pigtail cloud dwindling into nothingness, shook his head. "The air *couldn't* buoy up the weightless two-ton mass. The air was weightless, too. We never stopped to think...."

Now it was McNeil's turn to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

absorb the implications. He became almost as pale as Wollard. "We interposed a shield between the Earth's gravity and a column of air one hundred feet in diameter and as tall as the atmosphere. Gravity propagates at the speed of light. It must have been inrushing air that kicked the car around and formed the tornado."

Barnett was nodding vigorously. "Right. We made the column of air weightless. The surrounding air rushed into the space, became weightless, followed the original air into space, and the air behind *it* came rushing in. Coriolis force took care of the rest of what happened. It's a damned good thing the power did get cut off, or we'd be in trouble, and so would the rest of the world. My god." He stopped and pressed a hand to the top of his head. "We could pump the entire Earth's atmosphere out into space if we left that gravity shield on long enough."

Wollard's mouth dropped open, and he began fingering the buttons on his SR-11 calculator. In a moment he said, "Whew. Well, it would take something over thirteen million years for the Earth's atmosphere to leak out, assuming constant pressure."

"Yeah," said Barnett, "but most life would be dead long before that. Not enough air, you know?"

Then, a new look of dismay came over Wollard's face, and he went to work again on his SR-11.

"What is it, Nat?" McNeil demanded.

"We shot a thirty-second cylindrical pulse of antigravity into space. What happens if it hits the Sun? It was almost directly overhead when we started the test."

Mouths open, all three of them stared upward. Barnett glanced at his watch and then, shielding his eyes, stared approximately into the noonday glare. "Here comes the empirical evidence. Five hundred

FREE: 24th ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

The subscription coupon on the next page will bring you a free copy of our October 1973 24th Anniversary Issue, which is fast becoming a collector's item. It includes stories by Fritz Leiber, Randall Garrett, Kate Wilhelm, Manly Wade Wellman, R. Bretnor, Andre Norton and George Alec Effinger. You may use the coupon to enter a new subscription or to renew or extend your current one. The coupon is backed by this copy, and removal does not affect the text of the surrounding story.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seconds to get there, five hundred seconds for us to see the effect, if any. Sixteen and a half minutes. It ought to come anytime now." They held their breaths. Gradually, the minutes dragged by. The rough time-limit passed, and then a safety margin. Barnett shrugged and turned toward the other two. "See? Nothing."

Wollard said, "We missed, that's all. It's still going."

McNeil nodded. "And what happens when it hits another star? Or suppose it hits a populated planet." He stopped and shook his head. "Would those other intelligent people be able to trace it back here? Would they come to find us?" He looked at the other two. "Would they consider it a weapon? Aimed at them?"

Wollard said, "We'd better put the astronomers to work to see if anything's in the path of that beam. Lord, what have we done?"

Silas Whitemountain and his straw hat rejoined them. "Moves in a mysterious way, He does. That twister took the wings off your airplane so slick the damn thing looks like a car now."

The three looked glumly at him for a moment, and then suddenly McNeil straightened. "Wings. Of course," he said softly. "We could put the gravity shield on the bottom of a plane or rocket, put wings on her if we want, fly her up through most of the atmosphere, and then turn on the shield. That would eliminate the tornado and atmosphere loss problems."

"Good," said Barnett. "And our insurance ought to help us pay for this mess." He waved at the rubble around them.

"Yes," said Wollard softly. "And that leaves us with only one problem." He looked up in the direction the beam had gone. The other two looked up with him, looking along the same line of sight, wondering.

Mercury Press, Inc., Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753
Enter my subscription to F&SF, and rush me a free copy of *October 1973*.
I enclose ☐ $10.00 for one year; ☐ $24.00 for three years.

7-5

Please print

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State..... Zip#.....

Add $1.00 per year for Canada and Mexico; $2.00 for other foreign countries

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is a hard science fiction story, and yet it is misleading to say that, since it is not exactly a story, and although there is hard science here and huge concepts, the extrapolation is in a different direction than is usual. Anyhow, it is a distinctive and superior performance from Mr. Malzberg, whose recent books include *Conversations* (Bobbs Merill) and a somewhat different and expanded version of this work to be published shortly by Pyramid.

A Galaxy Called Rome

by BARRY N. MALZBERG

In memory of John W. Campbell

I

This is not a novelette but a series of notes. The novelette cannot be truly written because it partakes of its time, which is distant and could be perceived only through the idiom and devices of that era.

Thus the piece, by virtue of these reasons and others too personal even for this variety of True Confession, is little more than a set of constructions toward something less substantial...and, like the author, it cannot be completed.

II

The novelette would lean heavily upon two articles by the late John Campbell, for thirty-three years the editor of *Astounding/-Analog*, which were written shortly before his death untimely on July 11, 1971, and appeared as editorials in his magazine later that year, the second being perhaps the last piece which will ever bear his byline. They imagine a black galaxy which would result from the implosion of a neutron star, an implosion so mighty that gravitational forces unleashed would contain not only light itself but space and time; and *A Galaxy Called Rome* is his title, not mine, since he envisions a spacecraft that might be trapped within such a black galaxy and be unable to get out...because escape velocity would have to exceed the speed of light. All paths of travel would lead to this galaxy, then, none away. A galaxy called Rome.

III

Conceive then of a faster-than-light spaceship which would tumble into the black galaxy and would be unable to leave. Tumbling would be easy, or at least inevitable, since one of the characteristics of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

black galaxy would be its *invisibility,* and there the ship would be. The story would then pivot on the efforts of the crew to get out. The ship is named *Skipstone.* It was completed in 3892. Five hundred people died so that it might fly, but in this age life is held even more cheaply than it is today.

Left to my own devices, I might be less interested in the escape problem than that of adjustment. Light housekeeping in an anterior sector of the universe; submission to the elements, a fine, ironic literary despair. This is not science fiction however. Science fiction was created by Hugo Gernsback to show us the ways out of technological impasse. So be it.

IV

As interesting as the material was, I quailed even at this series of notes, let alone a polished, completed work. My personal life is my black hole, I felt like pointing out (who would listen?); my daughters provide more correct and sticky implosion than any neutron star, and the sound of the pulsars is as nothing to the music of the paddock area at Aqueduct racetrack in Ozone Park, Queens, on a clear summer Tuesday. "Enough of these breathtaking concepts, infinite distances, quasar leaps, binding messages amidst the arms of the spiral nebula," I could have pointed out. "I know that there are those who find an ultimate truth there, but I am not one of them. I would rather dedicate the years of life remaining (my melodramatic streak) to an understanding of the agonies of this middle-class town in northern New Jersey; until I can deal with those, how can I comprehend Ridgefield Park, to say nothing of the extension of fission to include progressively heavier gases?" Indeed, I almost abided to this until it occurred to me that Ridgefield Park would forever be as mysterious as the stars and that one could not deny infinity merely to pursue a particular that would be impenetrable until the day of one's death.

So I decided to try the novelette, at least as this series of notes, although with some trepidation, but trepidation did not unsettle me, nor did I grieve, for my life is merely a set of notes for a life, and Ridgefield Park merely a rough working model of Trenton, in which, nevertheless, several thousand people live who cannot discern their right hands from their left, and also much cattle.

V

It is 3895. The spacecraft *Skipstone,* on an exploratory flight through the major and minor galaxies surrounding the Milky Way, falls into the black galaxy of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

neutron star and is lost forever.

The captain of this ship, the only living consciousness of it, is its commander, Lena Thomas. True, the hold of the ship carries five hundred and fifteen of the dead sealed in gelatinous fix who will absorb unshielded gamma rays. True, these rays will at some time in the future hasten their reconstitution. True, again, that another part of the hold contains the prosthesis of seven skilled engineers, male and female, who could be switched on at only slight inconvenience and would provide Lena not only with answers to any technical problems which would arise but with companionship to while away the long and grave hours of the *Skipstone's* flight.

Lena, however, does not use the prosthesis, nor does she feel the necessity to. She is highly skilled and competent, at least in relation to the routine tasks of this testing flight, and she feels that to call for outside help would only be an admission of weakness, would be reported back to the Bureau and lessen her potential for promotion. (She is right; the Bureau has monitoried every cubicle of this ship, both visually and biologically; she can see or do nothing which does not trace to a printout; they would not think well of her if she was dependent upon outside assistance.) Toward the embalmed she feels somewhat more; her condition rattling in the hold of the ship as it moves on tachyonic drive seems to approximate theirs: although they are deprived of consciousness, that quality seems to be almost irrelevant to the condition of hyperspace; and if there were any way that she could bridge their mystery, she might well address them. As it is, she must settle for imaginary dialogues and for long, quiescent periods when she will watch the monitors, watch the rainbow of hyperspace, the collision of the spectrum, and say nothing whatsoever.

Saying nothing will not do, however, and the fact is that Lena talks incessantly at times, if only to herself. This is good because the story should have much dialogue; dramatic incident is best impelled through straightforward characterization, and Lena's compulsive need, now and then, to state her condition and its relation to the spaces she occupies will satisfy this need.

In her conversation, of course, she often addresses the embalmed. "Consider," she says to them, some of them dead eight hundred years, others dead weeks, all of them stacked in the hold in relation to their status in life and their ability to hoard assets to pay for the process that will return them their lives, "Consider what's going on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

here," pointing through the hold, the colors gleaming through the portholes onto her wrist, colors dancing in the air, her eyes quite full and maddened in this light, which does not indicate that she is mad but only that the condition of hyperspace itself is insane, the Michelson-Morley effect having a psychological as well as physical reality here. "Why it could be *me* dead and in the hold and all of you here in the dock watching the colors spin, it's all the same, all the same faster than light," and indeed the twisting and sliding effects of the tachyonic drive are such that at the moment of speech what Lena says is true.

The dead live; the living are dead, all slides and becomes jumbled together as she has noted; and were it not that their objective poles of consciousness were fixed by years of training and discipline, just as hers are transfixed by a different kind of training and discipline, she would press the levers to eject the dead one-by-one into the larger coffin of space, something which is indicated only as an emergency procedure under the gravest of terms and which would result in her removal from the Bureau immediately upon her return. The dead are precious cargo; they are, in essence, paying for the experiments and must be handled with the greatest delicacy. "I will handle you with the greatest delicacy," Lena says in hyperspace, "and I will never let you go, little packages in my little prison," and so on, singing and chanting as the ship moves on somewhat in excess of one million miles per second, always accelerating; and yet, except for the colors, the nausea, the disorienting swing, her own mounting insanity, the terms of this story, she might be in the IRT Lenox Avenue local at rush hour, moving slowly uptown as circles of illness move through the fainting car in the bowels of summer.

VI

She is twenty-eight years old. Almost two thousand years in the future, when man has established colonies on forty planets in the Milky Way, has fully populated the solar system, is working in the faster-than-light experiments as quickly as he can to move through other galaxies, the medical science of that day is not notably superior to that of our own, and the human lifespan has not been significantly extended, nor have the diseases of mankind which are now known as congenital been eradicated. Most of the embalmed were in their eighties or nineties; a few of them, the more recent deaths, were nearly a hundred, but the average lifespan still hangs somewhat short of eighty, and most of these have died

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from cancer, heart attacks, renal failure, cerebral blowout, and the like. There is some irony in the fact that man can have at least established a toehold in his galaxy, can have solved the mysteries of the FTL drive, and yet finds the fact of his own biology as stupefying as he has throughout history, but every sociologist understands that those who live in a culture are least qualified to criticize it (because they have fully assimilated the codes of the culture, even as to criticism), and Lena does not see this irony any more than the reader will have to in order to appreciate the deeper and more metaphysical irony of the story, which is this: that greater speed, greater space, greater progress, greater sensation has not resulted in any definable expansion of the limits of consciousness and personality and all that the FTL drive is to Lena is an increasing entrapment.

It is important to understand that she is merely a technician; that although she is highly skilled and has been trained through the Bureau for many years for her job as pilot, she really does not need to possess the technical knowledge of any graduate scientists of our own time...that her job, which is essentially a probe-and-ferrying, could be done by an adolescent; and that all of her training has afforded her no protection against the boredom and depression of her assignment.

When she is done with this latest probe, she will return to Uranus and be granted a six-month leave. She is looking forward to that. She appreciates the opportunity. She is only twenty-eight, and she is tired of being sent with the dead to tumble through the spectrum for weeks at a time, and what she would very much like to be, at least for a while, is a young woman. She would like to be at peace. She would like to be loved. She would like to have sex.

VII

Something must be made of the element of sex in this story, if only because it deals with a female protagonist (where asepsis will not work); and in the tradition of modern literary science fiction, where some credence is given to the whole range of human needs and behaviors, it would be clumsy and amateurish to ignore the issue. Certainly the easy scenes can be written and to great effect: Lena masturbating as she stares through the port at the colored levels of hyperspace; Lena dreaming thickly of intercourse as she unconsciously massages her nipples, the ship plunging deeper and deeper (as she does not yet know) toward the Black Galaxy; the Black Galaxy itself as some ultimate vaginal symbol of absorption whose Freud-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ian overcast will not be ignored in the imagery of this story...indeed, one can envision Lena stumbling toward the Evictors at the depths of her panic in the Black Galaxy to bring out one of the embalmed, her grim and necrophiliac fantasies as the body is slowly moved upwards on its glistening slab, the way that her eyes will look as she comes to consciousness and realizes what she has become...oh, this would be a very powerful scene indeed, almost anything to do with sex in space is powerful (one must also conjure with the effects of hyperspace upon the orgasm; would it be the orgasm which all of us know and love so well or something entirely different, perhaps detumescence, perhaps exaltation?), and I would face the issue squarely, if only I could, and in line with the very real need of the story to have powerful and effective dialogue.

"For God's sake," Lena would say at the end, the music of her entrapment squeezing her, coming over her, blotting her toward extinction, "for God's sake, all we ever needed was a fuck, that's all that sent us out into space, that's all that it ever meant to us, I've got to have it, got to have it, do you understand?" jamming her fingers in and out of her aqueous surfaces —

— But of course this would not work, at last in the story which I am trying to conceptualize. Space *is* aseptic; that is the secret of science fiction for forty-five years; it is not deceit or its adolescent audience or the publication codes which have deprived most of the literature of the range of human sexuality but the fact that in the clean and abysmal spaces between the stars sex, that demonstration of our perverse and irreplaceable humanity, would have no role at all. Not for nothing did the astronauts return to tell us their vision of otherworldiness, not for nothing did they stagger in their thick landing gear as they walked toward the colonels' salute, not for nothing did all of those marriages, all of those wonderful kids undergo such terrible strains. There is simply no room for it. It does not fit. Lena would understand this. "I never thought of sex," she would say, "never thought of it once, not even at the end when everything was around me and I was dancing."

VIII

Therefore it will be necessary to characterize Lena in some other way, and that opportunity will only come through the moment of crisis, the moment at which the *Skipstone* is drawn into the Black Galaxy of the neutron star. This moment will occur fairly early into the story, perhaps five or six hundred words deep (her previous life on the ship

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and impressions of hyperspace will come in expository chunks interwoven between sections of ongoing action), and her only indication of what has happened will be when there is a deep, lurching shiver in the gut of the ship where the embalmed lay and then she feels herself falling.

To explain this sensation it is important to explain normal hyperspace, the skip-drive which is merely to draw the curtains and to be in a cubicle. There is no sensation of motion in hyperspace, there could not be, the drive taking the *Skipstone* past any concepts of sound or light and into an area where there is no language to encompass nor glands to register. Were she to draw the curtains (curiously similar in their frills and pastels to what we might see hanging today in lower-middle-class homes of the kind I inhabit), she would be deprived of any sensation, but of course she cannot; she must open them to the portholes, and through them she can see the song of the colors to which I have previously alluded. Inside, there is a deep and grievous wretchedness, a feeling of terrible loss (which may explain why Lena thinks of exhuming the dead) that may be ascribed to the affects of hyperspace upon the corpus; but these sensations can be shielded, are not visible from the outside, and can be completely controlled by the phlegmatic types who comprise most of the pilots of these experimental flights. (Lena is rather phlegmatic herself. She reacts more to stress than some of her counterparts but well within the normal range perscribed by the Bureau, which admittedly does a superficial check.)

The effects of falling into the Black Galaxy are entirely different however, and it is here where Lena's emotional equipment becomes completely unstuck.

IX

At this point in the story great gobs of physics, astronomical and mathematic data would have to be incorporated, hopefully in a way which would furnish the hard-science basis of the story without repelling the reader.

Of course one should not worry so much about the repulsion of the reader; most who read science fiction do so in pursuit of exactly this kind of hard speculation (most often they are disappointed, but then most often they are after a time unable to tell the difference), and they would sit still much longer for a lecture than would, say, readers of the fictions of John Cheever, who could hardly bear sociological diatribes wedged into the everlasting vision of Gehenna which is Cheever's gift to his

LICENSED TO GNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

admirers. Thus it would be possible without awkwardness to make the following facts known, and these facts could indeed be set off from the body of the story and simply told like this:

It is posited that in other galaxies there are such as neutron stars, stars of four or five hundred times the size of our own or "normal" suns, which in their continuing nuclear process, burning and burning to maintain their light, will collapse in a mere ten to fifteen thousand years of difficult existence, their hydrogen fusing to helium then nitrogen and then to even heavier elements until with an implosion of terrific force, hungering for power which is no longer there, they collapse upon one another and bring disaster.

Disaster not only to themselves but possibly to the entire galaxy which they inhabit, for the gravitational force created by the implosion would be so vast as to literally seal in light. Not only light but sound and properties of all the stars in that great tube of force...so that the galaxy itself would be sucked into the funnel of gravitation created by the collapse and be absorbed into the flickering and desperate heart of the extinguished star.

It is possible to make several extrapolations from the fact of the neutron stars — and of the neutron stars themselves we have no doubt; many nova and supernova are now known to have been created by exactly this effect, not *ex-* but *im-*plosion — and some of them are these:

(a) The gravitational forces created, like great spokes wheeling out from the star, would drag in all parts of the galaxy within their compass; and because of the force of that gravitation, the galaxy would be invisible... these forces would, as has been said, literally contain light.

(b) The neutron star, functioning like a cosmic vacuum cleaner, might literally destroy the universe. Indeed, the universe may be in the slow process at this moment of being destroyed as hundreds of millions of its suns and planets are being inexorably drawn toward these great vortexes. The process would be *slow*, of course, but it is seemingly inexorable. One neutron star, theoretically, could absorb the universe. There are many more than one.

(c) The universe may have, obversely, been *created* by such an implosion, throwing out enormous cosmic filaments that, in a flickering

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

instant of time which is as eons to us but an instant to the cosmologists, are now being drawn back in. The universe may be an accident. (d) Cosmology aside, a ship trapped in such a vortex, such a "black," or invisible, galaxy, drawn toward the deadly source of the neutron star would be unable to leave it through normal faster-than-light drive...because the gravitation would absorb light, it would be impossible to build up any level of acceleration (which would at some point not exceed the speed of light) to permit escape. If it were possible to emerge from the field, it could only be done by an immediate switch to tachyonic drive without accelerative build-up...a process which could drive the occupant insane and which would, in any case, have no clear destination. The black hole of the dead star is a literal vacuum in space...one could fall through the hole, but where, then, would one go? (e) The actual process of being in the field of the dead star might well drive one insane.

For all of these reasons Lena does not know that she has fallen into the Galaxy Called Rome until the ship simply does so.

And she would instantly and irreparably become insane.

X

The technological data having been stated, the crisis of the story — the collapse into the Galaxy — having occurred early on, it would now be the obligation of the writer to describe the actual sensations involved in falling into the Black Galaxy. Since little or nothing is known of what these sensations would be — other than that it is clear that the gravitation would suspend almost all physical laws and might well suspend time itself, time only being a function of physics — it would be easy to lurch into a surrealistic mode here; Lena could see monsters slithering on the walls, two-dimensional monsters that is, little cut-outs of her past; she could re-enact her life *in full consciousness* from birth until death; she could literally be turned inside-out anatomically and perform in her imagination or in the flesh gross physical acts upon herself; she could live and die a thousand times in the lightless, timeless expanse of the pit...all of this could be done within the confines of the story, and it would doubtless lead to some very power-

LICENSED TO ONELOOK
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ful material. One could do it picaresque fashion, one perversity or lunacy to a chapter — that is to say, the chapters spliced together with more data on the gravitational excesses and the fact that neutron stars (this is interesting) are probably the pulsars which we have identified, stars which can be detected through sound but not by sight from unimaginable distances. The author could do this kind of thing, and do it very well indeed; he has done it literally hundreds of times before, but this, perhaps, would be in disregard of Lena. She has needs more imperative than those of the author, or even those of the editors. She is in terrible pain. She is suffering.

Falling, she sees the dead; falling, she hears the dead; the dead address her from the hold, and they are screaming, "Release us, release us, we are alive, we are in pain, we are in torment"; in their gelatinous flux, their distended limbs sutured finger and toe to the membranes which hold them, their decay has been reversed as the warp into which they have fallen has reversed time; and they are begging Lena from a torment which they cannot phrase, so profound is it; their voices are in her head, pealing and banging like oddly shaped bells, "Release us!" they scream; "we are no longer dead, the trumpet has sounded!" and so on and so forth, but Lena literally does not know what to do. She is merely the ferryman on this dread passage; she is not a medical specialist; she knows nothing of prophylaxis or restoration, and any movement she made to release them from the gelatin which holds them would surely destroy their biology, no matter what the state of their minds.

But even if this were not so, even if she could by releasing them give them peace, she cannot because she is succumbing to her own responses. In the black hole, if the dead are risen, then the risen are certainly the dead; she dies in this space, Lena does; she dies a thousand times over a period of seventy thousand years (because there is no objective time here, chronology is controlled only by the psyche, and Lena has a thousand full lives and a thousand full deaths), and it is terrible, of course, but it is also interesting because for every cycle of death there is a life, seventy years in which she can meditate upon her condition in solitude; and by the two hundredth death, the fourteen-thousandth year or more (or less, each of the lives is individual, some of them long, others short), Lena has come to an understanding of exactly where she is and what has happened to her. That it has taken her fourteen thousand years to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reach this understanding is in one way incredible, and yet it is a kind of miracle as well because in an infinite universe with infinite possibilities, all of them reconstituted for her, it is highly unlikely that even in fourteen thousand years she would stumble upon the answer, had it not been for the fact that she is unusually strong-willed and that some of the personalities through which she has lived are highly creative and controlled and have been able to do some serious thinking. Also there is a carry-over from life to life, even with the differing personalities, so that she is able to make use of preceding knowledge.

Most of the personalities are weak, of course, and not a few are insane, and almost all are cowardly, but there is a little residue; even in the worst of them there is enough residue to carry forth the knowledge, and so it is in the fourteen-thousandth year, when the truth of it has finally come upon her and she realizes what has happened to her and what is going on and what she must do to get out of there, and so it is [then] that she summons all of the strength and will which are left to her, and stumbling to the console (she is in her sixty-eighth year of this life and in the personality of an old, sniveling, whining man, an ex-ferryman himself), she summons one of the prostheses, the master engineer, the controller. All of this time the dead have been shrieking and clanging in her ears, fourteen thousand years of agony billowing from the hold and surrounding her in sheets like iron; and as the master engineer, exactly as he was when she last saw him fourteen thousand years and two weeks ago emerges from the console, the machinery whirring slickly, she gasps in relief, too weak to even respond with pleasure to the fact that in this condition of antitime, antilight, anticausality the machinery still works. But then it would. The machinery always works, even in this final and most terrible of all the hard-science stories. It is not the machinery which fails but its operators or, in extreme cases, the cosmos.

"What's the matter?" the master engineer says.

The stupidity of this question, its naivete and irrelevance in the midst of the hell she has occupied, stuns Lena, but she realizes even through the haze that the master engineer would, of course, come without memory of circumstances and would have to be apprised of background. This is inevitable. Whining and sniveling, she tells him in her old man's voice what has happened.

"Why that's terrible!" the master engineer says. "That's really

LICENSED TO OZ-NET
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terrible," and lumbering to a porhole, he looks out at the Black Galaxy, the Galaxy Called Rome, and one look at it causes him to lock into position and then disintegrate, not because the machinery has failed (the machinery never fails, not ultimately) but because it has merely recreated a human substance which could not possibly come to grips with what has been seen outside that porthole.

Lena is left alone again, then, with the shouts of the dead carrying forward.

Realizing instantly what has happened to her — fourteen thousand years of perception can lead to a quicker reaction time, if nothing else — she addresses the console again, uses the switches and produces three more prostheses, all of them engineers barely subsidiary to the one she has already addressed. (Their resemblance to the three comforters of Job will not be ignored here, and there will be an opportunity to squeeze in some quick religous allegory, which is always useful to give an ambitious story yet another level of meaning.) Although they are not quite as qualified or definitive in their opinions as the original engineer, they are bright enough by far to absorb her explanation, and, this time, her warnings not to go to the portholes, not to look upon the galaxy, are heeded. Instead, they stand there in rigid and curiously mortified postures, as if waiting for Lena to speak.

"So you see," she says finally, as if concluding a long and difficult conversation, which in fact she has, "as far as I can see, the only way to get out of this black galaxy is to go directly into tachyonic drive. Without any accelerative build-up at all."

The three comforters nod slowly, bleakly. They do not quite know what she is talking about, but then again, they have not had fourteen thousand years to ponder this point. "Unless you can see anything else," Lena says, "unless you can think of anything different. Otherwise, it's going to be infinity in here, and I can't take much more of this, really. Fourteen thousand years is enough."

"Perhaps," the first comforter suggests softly, "perhaps it is your fate and your destiny to spend infinity in this black hole. Perhaps in some way you are determining the fate of the universe. After all, it was you who said that it all might be a gigantic accident, eh? Perhaps your suffering gives it purpose."

"And then too," the second lisps, "you've got to consider the deads down there. This isn't very easy for them, you know, what with being jolted alive and all that, and an immediate vault into tacyonic would probably destroy them for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good. The Bureau wouldn't like that, and you'd be liable for some pretty stiff damages. No, if I were you I'd stay with the dead," the second concludes, and a clamorous murmur seems to arise from the hold at this, although whether it is one of approval or of terrible pain is difficult to tell. The dead are not very expressive.

"Anyway," the third says, brushing a forelock out of his eyes, averting his glance from the omnipresent and dreadful portholes, "there's little enough to be done about this situation. You've fallen into a neutron star, a black funnel. It is utterly beyond the puny capacities and possibilities of man. I'd accept my fate if I were you." His model was a senior scientist working on quasar theory, but in reality he appears to be a metaphysician. "There are corners of experience into which man cannot stray without being severely penalized."

"That's very easy for you to say," Lena says bitterly, her whine breaking into clear glissando, "but you haven't suffered as I have. Also, there's at least a theoretical possibility that I'll get out of here if I do the build-up without acceleration."

"But where will you land?" the third says, waving a trembling forefinger. "And when? All rules of space and time have been destroyed here; only gravity persists. You can fall through the center of this sun, but you do not know where you will come out or at what period of time. It is inconceivable that you would emerge into normal space in the time you think of as contemporary."

"No," the second says, "I wouldn't do that. You and the dead are joined together now; it is truly your fate to remain with them. What is death? What is life? In the Galaxy Called Rome all roads lead to the same, you see; you have ample time to consider these questions, and I'm sure that you will come up with something truly viable, of much interest."

"Ah, well," the first says, looking at Lena, "if you must know, I think that it would be much nobler of you to remain here; for all we know, your condition gives substance and viability to the universe. Perhaps you *are* the universe. But you're not going to listen anyway, and so I won't argue the point. I really won't," he says rather petulantly and then makes a gesture to the other two; the three of them quite deliberately march to a porthole, push a curtain aside and look out upon it. Before Lena can stop them — not that she is sure she would, not that she is sure that this is not exactly what she has willed — they have been reduced to ash.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And she is left alone with the screams of the dead.

XI

It can be seen that the satiric aspects of the scene above can be milked for great implication, and unless a very skillful controlling hand is kept upon the material, the piece could easily degenerate into farce at this moment. It is possible, as almost any comedian knows, to reduce (or elevate) the starkest and most terrible issues to scatology or farce simply by particularizing them; and it will be hard not to use this scene for a kind of needed comic relief in what is, after all, an extremely depressing tale, the more depressing because it has used the largest possible canvas on which to imprint its messages that man is irretrievably dwarfed by the cosmos. (At least, that is the message which it would be easiest to wring out of the material; actually I have other things in mind, but how many will be able to detect them?)

What will save the scene and the story itself, around this point, will be the lush physical descriptions of the Black Galaxy, the neutron star, the altering effects they have had upon perceived reality. Every rhetorical trick, every typographical device, every nuance of language and memory which the writer has to call upon will be utilized in this section describing the appearance of the black hole and its effects upon Lena's (admittedly distorted) consciousness. It will be a bleak vision, of course, but not necessarily a hopeless one; it will demonstrate that our concepts of "beauty" or "ugliness" or "evil" or "good" or "love" or "death" are little more than metaphors, semantically limited, framed-in by the poor receiving equipment in our heads; and it will be suggested that, rather than showing us a different or alternative reality, the black hole may only be showing us the only reality we know, but *extended,* infinitely extended so that the story may give us, as good science fiction often does, at this point some glimpse of possibilities beyond ourselves, possibilities not to be contained in word rates or the problems of editorial qualification. And also at this point of the story it might be worthwhile to characterize Lena in a "warmer" and more "sympathetic" fashion so that the reader can see her as a distinct and admirable human being, quite plucky in the face of all her disasters and fourteen thousand years, two hundred lives. This can be done through conventional fictional technique: individuation through defining idiosyncrasy, tricks of speech, habits, mannerisms, and so on. In common everyday fiction we could give her

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an affecting stutter, a dimple on her left breast, a love of policemen, fear of red convertibles, and leave it at that; in this story, because of its considerably extended theme, it will be necessary to do better than that, to find originalities of idiosyncrasy which will, in their wonder and suggestion of panoramic possibility, approximate the black hole...but no matter. No matter. This can be done; the section interweaving Lena and her vision of the black hole will be the flashiest and most admired but in truth the easiest section of the story to write, and I am sure that I would have no trouble with it whatsoever if, as I said much earlier, this were a story instead of a series of notes for a story, the story itself being unutterably beyond our time and space and devices and to be glimpsed only in empty little flickers of light much as Lena can glimpse the black hole, much as she knows the gravity of the neutron star. These notes are as close to the vision of the story as Lena herself would ever get.

As this section ends, it is clear that Lena has made her decision to attempt to leave the Black Galaxy by automatic boost to tachyonic drive. She does not know where she will emerge or how, but she does know that she can bear this no longer.

She prepares to set the controls, but before this it is necessary to write the dialogue with the dead.

XII

One of them presumably will appoint himself as the spokesman of the many and will appear before Lena in this newspace as if in a dream. "Listen here," this dead would say, one born in 3361, dead in 3401, waiting eight centuries for exhumation to a society that can rid his body of leukemia (he is bound to be disappointed), "you've got to face the facts of the situation here. We can't just leave in this way. Better the death we know than the death you will give us."

"The decision is made," Lena says, her fingers straight on the controls. "There will be no turning back."

"We are dead now," the leukemic says. "At least let this death continue. At least in the bowels of this galaxy where there is no time we have a kind of life or at least that nonexistence of which we have always dreamed. I could tell you many of the things we have learned during these fourteen thousand years, but they would make little sense to you, of course. We have learned resignation. We have had great insights. Of course all of this would go beyond you."

"Nothing goes beyond me. Nothing at all. But it does not matter."

"Everything matters. Even here

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

there is consequence, causality, a sense of humanness, one of responsibility. You can suspend physical laws, you can suspend life itself, but you cannot separate the moral imperatives of humanity. There are absolutes. It would be apostasy to try and leave."

"Man must leave," Lena says, "man must struggle, man must attempt to control his conditions. Even if he goes from worse to obliteration, that is still his destiny." Perhaps the dialogue is a little florid here. Nevertheless, this will be the thrust of it. It is to be noted that putting this conventional viewpoint in the character of a woman will give another of those necessary levels of irony with which the story must abound if it is to be anything other than a freak show, a cascade of sleazy wonders shown shamefully behind a tent...but irony will give it legitimacy. "I don't care about the dead," Lena says. "I only care about the living."

"Then care about the universe," the dead man says, "care about that, if nothing else. By trying to come out through the center of the black hole, you may rupture the seamless fabric of time and space itself. You may destroy everything. Past and present and future. The explosion may extend the funnel of gravitational force to infinite size, and all of the universe will be driven into the hole."

Lena shakes her head. She knows that the dead is merely another one of her tempters in a more cunning and cadaverous guise. "You are lying to me," she says. "This is merely another effect of the Galaxy Called Rome. I am responsible to myself, only to myself. The universe is not at issue."

"That's a rationalization," the leukemic says, seeing her hesitation, sensing his victory, "and you know it as well as I do. You can't be an utter solipsist. You aren't God, there is no God, not here, but if there was it wouldn't be you. You must measure the universe about yourself."

Lena looks at the dead and the dead looks at her; and in that confrontation, in the shade of his eyes as they pass through the dull lusters of the neutron star effect, she sees that they are close to a communion so terrible that it will become a weld, become a connection...that if she listens to the dead for more than another instant, she will collapse within those eyes as the *Skipstone* has collapsed into the black hole; and she cannot bear this, it cannot be...she must hold to the belief, that there is some separation between the living and the dead and that there is dignity in that separation, that life is not death but something else because, if she cannot accept that, she denies

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BALLANTINE BOOKS
A Division of Random House, Inc.

ALWAYS THE BEST IN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

- **A MIDSUMMER TEMPEST**
  Poul Anderson $1.50
- **WHEN HARLIE WAS ONE**
  David Gerrold $1.50
- **STAR TREK LOG FOUR**
  Alan Dean Foster $1.25
- **FARMER IN THE SKY**
  Robert A. Heinlein $1.50
- **THE BEST OF HENRY KUTTNER**
  Introduction by Ray Bradbury $1.95
- **DECISION AT DOONA**
  Anne McCaffrey $1.50
- **GATHER, DARKNESS!**
  Fritz Leiber $1.50
- **A CASE OF CONSCIENCE**
  James Blish $1.50
- **POLICE YOUR PLANET**
  Lester del Rey $1.50

You'll find them all wherever paperback books are sold. Or, to order by mail, send price per book(s) plus 50¢ per order for handling to Ballantine Cash Sales, P.O. Box 505, Westminster, Maryland 21157. Please allow three weeks for delivery.

herself...and quickly then, quickly before she can consider further, she hits the controls that will convert the ship instantly past the power of light; and then in the explosion of many suns that might only be her heart she hides her head in her arms and screams.

And the dead screams with her, and it is not a scream of joy but not of terror either...it is the true natal cry suspended between the moments of limbo, life and expiration, and their shrieks entwine in the womb of the *Skipstone* as it pours through into the redeemed light.

XIII

The story is open-ended, of course.

Perhaps Lena emerges into her own time and space once more, all of this having been a sheath over the greater reality. Perhaps she emerges into an otherness. Then again, she may never get out of the black hole at all but remains and lives there, the *Skipstone* a planet in the tubular universe of the neutron star, the first or last of a series of planets collapsing toward their deadened sun. If the story is done correctly, if the ambiguities are prepared right, if the technological data is stated well, if the material is properly visualized ... well, it does not matter then what happens to Lena, her *Skipstone*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and her dead. Any ending will do. Any would suffice and be emotionally satisfying to the reader.

Still, there is an inevitable ending.

It seems clear to the writer, who will not, cannot write this story, but if he did he would drive it through to this one conclusion, the conclusion clear, implied really from the first and bound, bound utterly, into the text.

So let the author have it.

XIV

In the infinity of time and space, all is possible, and as they are vomited from that great black hole, spilled from this anus of a neutron star (I will not miss a single Freudian implication if I can), Lena and her dead take on this infinity, partake of the vast canvas of possibility. Now they are in the Antares Cluster flickering like a bulb; here they are at the heart of Sirius the Dog Star five hundred screams from the hold; here again in ancient Rome watching Jesus trudge up carrying the Cross of Calvary...and then again in another unimaginable galaxy dead across from the Milky Way a billion light-years in span with a hundred thousand habitable planets, each of them with their Calvary...and they are not, they are not yet satisfied.

They cannot, being human, partake of infinity; they can partake of only what they know. They cannot, being created from the consciousness of the writer, partake of what he does not know but what is only close to him. Trapped within the consciousness of the writer, the penitentiary of his being, as the writer is himself trapped in the *Skipstone* of his mortality, Lena and her dead emerge in the year 1975 to the town of Ridgefield Park, New Jersey, and there they inhabit the bodies of its fifteen thousand souls, and there they are, there they are yet, dwelling amidst the refineries, strolling on Main Street, sitting in the Rialto theatre, shopping in the supermarkets, pairing off and clutching one another in the imploded stars of their beds on this very night at this very moment, as that accident, the author, himself one of them, has conceived them.

It is unimaginable that they would come, Lena and the dead, from the heart of the Galaxy Called Rome to tenant Ridgefield Park, New Jersey...but more unimaginable still that from all the Ridgefield Parks of our time we will come and assemble and build the great engines which will take us to the stars and some of the stars will bring us death and some bring life and some will bring nothing at all but the engines will go on and on and so — after a fashion, in our fashion — will we.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Here is another ("Jeanette's Hands," January 1973) good story about Bob Archer, who is an astronomer, and his wife Dagny, who is the California State Witch . . .

A Drop of Dragon's Blood

by PHILIP LATHAM

It was on a Sunday morning in October that Bob and Dagny got to discussing ghosts. Long ago, by mutual consent, they had agreed that any mention of the occult or supernatural was strictly taboo. Bob started it, although at the time, nothing could have been farther from his mind. What he was trying to do was follow a football game on a television set that resolutely refused to function.

"It's third and goal for the Rams with fifty seconds to go," the announcer droned. "Redskins leading twelve to seven. A field goal won't help. The ball is snapped —"

"Damn!"

Bob jumped up and began frantically fiddling with the dials. Nothing helped. The figures on the screen remained tangled in a hopeless blur. Finally he snapped off the switch in disgust, sauntered to the window, and stood gazing at a landscape shrouded in dust.

"Looks like a Santana's blowing up," he commented.

"The game is over?" said Dagny, sipping coffee from her bedside tray and leisurely scanning the paper. Breakfast in bed for his wife was a custom Bob had initiated for her on their honeymoon seven years ago.

"Over for me," Bob growled, pulling off his shirt and fanning himself with the society section. Dagny lay back on the pillows, cool and serene in her thin negligee, hands clasped behind her head, her fingers buried in her thick golden hair.

"Your team, *es ce qu elle etait victorieuse?*" she inquired, lapsing into French. Although native Russian, she had spent her youth in Paris, where she had appeared professionally in repertory. This accounted for her occasional habit of inserting quotations into the conversation from characters she

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had portrayed. It was not an affectation. She did it without realizing the fact.

"Don't know who beat," Bob said. "TV set, I guess."

"Comment cela?"

"Every player had a ghost. Every player's ghost had a ghost. Hard to follow a game with sixty-six spooks on the field, not counting the officials."

Dagny studied him with that same introspective expression which their ginger cat, Marguerita, surveyed the curious antics of *Homo sapiens.*

"You were lucky," she remarked.

"How's that?"

"One so seldom sees a ghost."

"Seems to me I've been hearing about people seeing ghosts all my life. Other day, read about a fellow at West Point claimed seeing ghost of an old soldier walking out of the wall. Swore to God it was true."

"Vraiment?"

"Some smart guys tried to trap him. Set up infrared cameras, photocells, magnetometers. Old soldier never showed a whisker."

"Naturellement."

"How come?"

"Ghosts are plentiful but shy. In haunted houses, one hears rats ... sees shadows ... feels cold wind. But ghosts — *non.* They come always when you least expect. Never when you search."

"You ought to know," Bob shrugged. "That's your field."

Mrs. Dagny Archer, as Official California State Witch, was the constituted authority on all matters *mystique.* Bob, or Dr. Robert Archer, as an astronomer on the staff of the Mt. Elsinore Observatory, also held certain opinions on astrology although he lacked the vigorous vocabulary for their expression. Briefly, he held that all astrology should be consigned to the realm of Taurus the Bull. Yet their conflicting views had never marred their marital relationship. They got along beautifully by the simple process or ignoring the subject.

But ghosts at West Point and football games were off the agenda.

"Dagny, honestly, do you believe in ghosts?" he said.

"Cela depend —" She stopped abruptly. "That interests you?"

"Oh, maybe, a little," Bob confessed. "I can't help wondering why those fellows at West Point never got so much as a shadow with their high-powered electronics. I've just had sort of same job handed me. Not looking for ghosts," he added hastily. "Trying to find why an extremely sensitive new type spectrophotometer won't work."

"It will take long?"

"Oh, two weeks maybe."

"I will be alone two weeks!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You don't need to be. You could come along."

Accompanying Bob to the observatory on Mt. Elsinore had once been a delight. But the novelty soon wore off. So far as being with Bob was concerned, she might as well have remained home. He worked all night, slept all morning, and spent most of the afternoon trying to find what had gone wrong with his observations. Also, the observatory was no isolated haven in the wildwood. Transcendental meditation had to be carried on amid the outcries of lost juveniles, popping beer cans, and the clamor of amateur photographers trying to shoot Mom and Dad posed with a deer.

"For you, Robert, the observatory is fine. You have your work. But for me, up on the mountain top, the stars are no nearer."

"Who said anything about going on the mountain top?"

"Mais non!"

"This trip we're going *down.*"

"You mean — *a bas? Comme le soleil?*"

"Well, not exactly. The Mt. Elsinore observatory is seven thousand feet above sea level. This observatory is *below* sea level."

"Below? *Sous-marin? Non! Non! Non!*"

Bob laughed.

"Don't worry. You won't need your diving suit or snorkel tube. You see, a wealthy old fellow left the institution a big chunk of money to establish an observatory in memory of his wife. Only one provision — must be in Death Valley. His wife loved Death Valley. So it must be in Death Valley."

"La Vallee de Morte."

"And it was a wise choice. Turned out to be an ideal site for this new wide-angle camera. Total cost must have run near a million for the instrumentation alone."

"What an honor to work on such a camera."

"Honor — hell! Probably dumped the job on me 'cause nobody else would take it. A machinist and I will be slaving on it like a couple of mechanics in a garage."

He fell thoughtful.

"I think you might like the desert, Dagny. There's a peculiar fascination about it. Almost like living in another dimension."

Bob chuckled.

"One thing's for sure. It's got the swellest living quarters. Fellow was married to a woman about your age. Died suddenly. Real beauty. So he designed the living quarters just the way he thought she'd like it. Air conditioned ... temperature-controlled swimming pool ... bathroom that'd make Cleopatra's look like an outhouse. Nice couple to do the housework.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Guy had bigger ideas than the Mogul emperor built the Taj Mahal."

"*Merveilleux* ...."

"Then you'll go?"

"I will go."

"Oh, I'm so glad!"

There was an unusual fervor in Bob's voice. It was not that Bob lacked temperament: impatience, resentment, anger. But seldom such rapture and tenderness. And it was for real. Dagny, as an actress, could detect pretense in an instant.

"Robert, such *passion!* You are playing Troilus to my Cressida. Me — what help can I be? For you, it is your job."

"Perhaps my last job."

"Last ...."

"Could be."

The wind of the Santana was coming harder now. Bob went around the room, shutting the doors and locking tight the windows, before returning beside to Dagny.

"Next year, for the first time, the government intends to tax the institution. There're billions of dollars in churches, charities, and research institutions like ours that supports the observatory. For years we've been operating on a tighter and tighter budget.

"With this new tax we've really got to economize. How? Well... one way is cutting down on personnel."

"But you don't me —"

"Yes, I mean me. Might as well face it. I'm not such an adornment to the staff. Never doubled the size of the universe. Never had an 'effect' named for me. Never turned up a pulsar spelling out four letter words."

He drew Dagny closer.

"Don't think I haven't tried. Well ... few months ago, thought I hit something looked pretty good. Few months ago, I got interested in that red supergiant, Omicron Ceti."

"Mira ... 'Mira the Wonderful.'"

"One of these long period variables, with a light cycle about eleven months, on the average. But it's got a range of two months. Impossible to predict its next maximum or minimum. Star probably swells and contracts like a giant balloon.*

"I caught something I thought gave me a clue to its periodicity. Big thing if I was right. So I did a thing no scientist should ever do. I deliberately made a bid for publicity. Predicted next maximum

*The mean period of Mira has remained unchanged at 331.4 days for more than 400 cycles, ranging from 310 to 355 days. At maximum light it has been as bright as Polaris. At minimum, it is below naked-eye visibility, nearly magnitude 10.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

would be between November 1 and 3. Went out on a limb and published it."

He stared at the landscape blurred with dust.

"Other day, I was talking with MacGuire. He's a variable star man keeps a regular check on Mira."

"I know."

"And he says Mira's about ninth magnitude. Still stuck down around minimum."

"But this is still October."

Bob shook his head.

"No chance. Old girl couldn't possibly make it to maximum light in two weeks. A scientist's not like a surgeon who goofs up an operation. He should keep his mouth shut till he knows. But me — I committed myself. No brains at all."

Dagny's negligee had slipped down revealing her bare shoulder and breast. She made no effort to retrieve it.

"Oh, Robert, cheer up. Poor Mira. So she is dark and depressed. *Eh bien!*" She snapped her fingers. "It is not the end of the world."

"No, it's not the end of the world. But it could be the end of my job."

He ran his fingers over Dagny's shoulder.

"Mira's as fascinating as a woman. Rather I should say the Mira *system*. Mira's got a tiny little companion like a pale blue ghost."

Suddenly a gust of wind struck, shaking the whole house.

"Robert," Dagny exclaimed, "we have two wonderful weeks ahead of us, away from this hateful world of misery and deceit." She swept aside the paper with a contemptuous gesture. "We shall pretend it does not exist. Let us live like the night-blooming cereus, that blossoms at dusk and dies at dawn. Better one hour of ecstasy than a lifetime of dreary toil."

They clasped in a tight embrace, unmindful of the rising wind.

II

The driver pulled to a stop beside a marker.

"Lowest spot on the American continent," he said. "Two hundred eighty feet below sea level."

The thermometer in the car stood at 106 degrees. What must be the temperature outside, Dagny wondered, in the blazing sun?

Already she was beginning to feel the fascination of the desert. The dull plain and brilliant mountains. The masses of towering cumulus cloud. And the awesome silence.

"There's nothing moving. Nothing alive."

The driver smiled grimly.

"Don't you believe it. There's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

life aplenty on the desert. But invisible — underground."

They drove on in silence. Conversation seemed out of place in such surroundings. Suddenly they rounded a curve, and Dagny could not suppress a cry of delight.

The car was pulling up a driveway leading to a low rambling house, their home for the coming fortnight. The Emerald City of Oz in a setting of brown and gray. A middle-aged man and woman stood smiling at the door. The man hurried down a winding path to the car.

"I'll bring your luggage. Get out of this heat," he shouted. "Sun this time of day worse'n a Gila monster."

Halfway to the house Dagny paused involuntarily at sight of a bronze plaque surrounded by cactus blossoms.

"Here lies Milena
Who in her brief life
Was the loveliest of women."

The words of the driver came back. "There's life aplenty on the desert. But invisible — underground."

Inside the door the sting of air-conditioning set their skin prickling. But the sensation soon wore off. The woman showed them their rooms. Bob had not exaggerated. It was a motion picture director's idea of an observing station.

Toward sunset they took a dip in the pool, then changed, and sat watching the changing hues of the landscape. The domes of the observatory where Bob would work were barely visible in the fading light. The low hills, smooth mounds of gold by day, were now deep red.

Dagny had some soft drink. Bob smoked and sipped a martini.

"Peculiar crimson, those hills," Bob remarked. "Must be about same shade as Mira at minimum. Color index plus four, I'd guess."

"Dragon's Blood," said Dagny.

"Star like a drop of Dragon's Blood," Bob murmured. "Why not, for a star in Cetus the Sea Monster?"

The air was growing chill. The towering clouds of the afternoon were gone by sunset.

"Tell you what," Bob said, "after dinner when it's really night, I want you to see the sky as people saw it thousands of years ago. Before smog was invented and other improvements."

After the table was cleared, they sat in the living room with the lights out for half an hour, then slipped on some wraps and stepped out by the pool again. There was no moon. The sky was so thick with stars that the constellations were scarcely recognizable. Yet the sky was not black but illumined by a bluish glow.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"There's the Big Dipper skimming those mountains. Cassiopeia's just opposite. So that star halfway between is Polaris. Now we're oriented. Pleiades and Aldebaran coming up straight east, and Vega and Cygnus setting on our right."

He took Dagny's arm.

"Take a look at that band through Cassiopeia."

"The Milky Way!"

"Right! Why there's people today never seen the Milky Way."

"It's the highway lined by the shining palaces of the gods."

"Sure got all the lights going full blast," was Bob's comment. "No energy crisis up there."

He turned his attention to an inconspicuous blank area in the southeast.

"Keep an eye on the gods for a minute, will you? Something I want to check on."

He went to a small telescope mounted by the railing, and after focusing on a bright star, he began slowly sweeping the sky in Cetus. Finally he picked up the object he wanted and spent a few minutes studying it intently. Presently he swung the telescope aside and returned to Dagny.

"Damn Mira," he said. "Looks fainter instead of brighter to me."

Dagny was intent upon some object of her own.

"Robert," she said, "there's a cloud, in Pisces, I think."

Bob followed her gaze, moving his head slowly back and forth, trying to glimpse Dagny's object by averted vision.

"So there is!" he exclaimed. "Gosh! Loks like rain."

"It doesn't seem like a rain cloud."

"Kind of oval shaped." He studied it a moment. "Here's an idea. You try and fix its position among the stars and we'll look for it again tomorrow night."

He waited several minutes while Dagny was getting her "fix." The stars of Pisces are faint and far between.

Finally she turned aside.

"Got it?" Bob said.

"I think so."

"Then let's call off our observing program for the night. Get indoors, sit and watch the fire, and try to forget about my job and Mira."

III

It was nearly ten when Dagny awoke. For a while she lay dozing, reveling in the luxury of her new surroundings. There was a slip of paper tucked under her pillow.

"Mon Ange — Had breakfast 7 AM. Try the eggs and Canadian bacon. Be at observatory all day. Back sunset. Love and kisses. Robert."

After reading this impassioned billet several times, she summoned

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the effort to rise and wander into the bathroom. It was not so much a bathrom as a salon designed for the express purpose of enhancing a woman's feminity. Not *any* woman, but one *very special* woman. It was haunted by her personality.

Plumbing fixtures which in a former age would have promptly consigned them and their maker to the flames. No artisan but the devil himself could have conjured up hydrology of such cunning design. Deep soft carpeting. The walls and curtains glowing with huge exotic desert flora. Going to the bathroom in such surroundings was not a matter of functional bodily necessity. Rather it was more like stepping into one of Henri Rousseau's dream landscapes, beautiful, but vaguely menaced by serpents and moonlit lions.

Dagny used the shower, but preferred to arrange her hair and face by the mirror in their bedroom. This important ritual completed, she had breakfast — or lunch — served in bed on a tray, with a scarlet orchid cactus on the side.

Afterward she looked through some books she had brought along to catch up on her reading, but found herself skipping pages, and put them aside. She tried assembling her horoscope, but the results were difficult to interpret, and singularly lacking in significance. Finally she abandoned all pretense at work, put some Tchaikovsky on the record player, and stretched out on the cushions by the long picture window.

For a long time her eyes dwelt on the marker by the garden path. Then her gaze wandered to the clouds and their shadows drifting lazily over the plain.

Dagny, usually so alert, found herself weighed down by a strange sense of apathy. To her Slavic temperament the music of Tchaikovsky was like an opiate. She was wandering in a jungle of monstrous cactus trees with grotesque twisted arms. Robert's face kept peering down at her from the blossoms at the top, but Robert unsmiling, with sad, anxious eyes. He was trying to tell her something, but she was unable to catch his words. Upon coming closer, his face faded into the cactus blossoms, only to reappear countlessly repeated farther on. She rushed on fratically, from one plant to another, but there was no end to them ....

"Dagny."

Robert was peering down at her, but this time Robert for real, his face solid and substantial. She sat up, confused. It was high noon a moment ago. Now the sun had set and the hills bathed in Dragon's Blood. A whole day gone and nothing done.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I'm afraid this desert will be my ruination," she said, brushing back her hair. "It has a fascination ... casts a spell."

"I know," said Bob. "I've felt it myself."

"Tired?" she asked, after a pause.

"A little," he said. "But we're doing all right — progressing." He seemed to get scant satisfaction out of the fact.

"I think there's martinis —"

"I could go for that."

IV

Bob emptied his second glass.

"Queer thing about electronics," he remarked. "You screw some gadgetry down on a breadboard. Works fine. Then you give it the full treatment. A bejeweled expertise assembly. And what's the result? Damn thing won't work. Full of bugs."

They repeated the ritual of the previous night. Bob cast a glance in the direction of Cetus, shrugged, and strolled over to Dagny.

"How's the cloud?"

"It's still there!"

This time Bob had no trouble locating the faint oval patch in Pisces.

"Hmmmmm ... so it is. Moved a little east maybe."

"Robert, you deceive me. You are joking."

"Me? Joking? Never more serious in my life."

Dagny stretched out on one of the possible chairs. "I won't say one word more till you tell me."

"Well, maybe I was kind of kidding," he admitted. "Dagny, my darling, you've made a discovery."

"A real discovery!"

Bob nodded. "You've rediscovered the gegenschein."

"Gegenschein?"

Dagny had a smattering of a half-dozen languages. But this was an expression that caught her wide-eyed.

"Gegenschein? You mean — counterglow?"

"That's it. 'Counterglow' because it's always exactly opposite — counter — to the sun's position."*

"Then you did know!" Dagny cried. "You knew all the time?"

"Every astronomer knows about the gegenschein, but very few ever seen it. It's been independently discovered four times since 1853. You have the honor of being number five."

"What is it?"

"Nobody knows."

"How far away?"

"Nobody knows that for sure, either. Let's say, under a million miles."

**Bob was a little off. There is evidence for a westerly deviation of 2 degrees or 3 degrees.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But you have some theory?"

"Oh, sure, always got theories. What's the gegenschein? Well, it's a bunch of junk or the sun-earth-particle line. Special solution of the three body problem. It's part of the zodiacal light. It's a gaseous tail sticking out behind the earth like a comet's. And several others. You can take your choice."

He heaved a long sigh.

"Trouble with all these bright ideas is digging up sufficient concentration of particles necessary to account for the brightness observed. They all make the damn thing too thin."

Dagny was visibly shaken.

"Why have we never heard of this gegenschein before?"

"Don't know. Never been top secret. Considerable work done on it, in fact."

He frowned.

"It's maddening to have a large object, so close to the earth, visible to the eye, and yet know so little about it."

"This will upset all our astrological concepts," Dagny declared. "I must convey this information to the society at once."

"You do that," Bob told her. "Pour it on."

V

Thenceforth, each night, they kept watch on the motion of the gegenschein. Each night Bob cast a glance at Cetus, turned away, and joined Dagny.

"Lucky we came here this time in October," he told her. "No moon this time of the month and a vacant sky. The gegenschein's invisible when it's in the Milky Way."

"Robert?"

"Yes?"

"I've made up my own hypothesis about the gegenschein."

"Good for you," Bob said. "Let's hear it."

"You won't laugh?"

"Cross my heart."

"Well ... I think it is where our spirits go after death. The gegenschein is the sunlight reflected from angels."

Bob had to think this over for several minutes before rendering an opinion.

"I am not prepared to speak offhand concerning the dynamics of the situation," he replied cautiously. "I should say the chief merit of your angel hypothesis consists in the abundance of its light-scattering mass. Trouble with other hypotheses is they give a gegenschein of such tenuous density. Too damn thin, in other words."

"Oh! N'est-ce que cela? No problem!"

"But there must be billions of dead, compared to the living. Your ghosts would be packed like sardines."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"But ghosts scatter ... evanesce ... eventually. They are unlimited yet finite. Ghosts wear out after a while. Didn't you know? Where are the ghosts of yesteryear? Of the ancient Greeks and Romans? Does one ever see them? No. A ghost lasts scarcely a century."

"Hmmmmm. So they do."

They sat till nearly midnight, scarcely speaking, preoccupied in thought. Pisces and Cetus were past the meridian when Bob came out of his reverie.

"Maybe we'd better be getting in," he said, his voice tired and disconsolate. "Take another look at your angel island. You won't be seeing it for long."

"No?"

"We'll be leaving soon. Work on the camera's about wound up.

"Queer how people's minds work," he said, as they sauntered along the pool. "Your notion about the gegenschein's not so different from my own. Ever since I first saw the gegenschein years ago, I've always thought of it as the earth's ghostly companion in space. Can't escape from it. Always there, haunting us, but seldom seen."

He paused at the door, glancing absently over his shoulder. Suddenly he stiffened, with a sharp intake of breath.

"By god! I think that's Mira!"

"Mira? Where?"

"Just below — south — of the gegenschein. I'll swear it wasn't there when we came out."

All his lassitude of a moment ago was gone. He rushed to the telescope and swung it on the star.

"It's her all right!" he cried. "I know the star field around Mira better'n I know my own face."

He stood for a moment, hesitating, struggling with himself.

"MacGuire should know. Try, anyhow."

"Tell him?"

"Tell him! Hell, he's been on it for hours."

For some unaccountable reason, Bob had more trouble calling Mt. Elsinore than getting through to Shanghai.

"Yes, operator, I'm still waiting. Have been for ten minutes. ...I'm trying to get Dr. MacGuire at the Mount Elsinore Observatory. Tell 'em it's Bob Archer calling. He knows me .... Says he can't — I don't care if he's hemorrhaging to death. But *get him!*"

Another long wait. Finally a response from the other end.

"MacGuire? ... Bob Archer. Say, what's doing with Mira? ... Yeah? ... Yeah? ... That was about my guess ... You're sure? Thanks."

Bob hung up and sat down by Dagny, staring dazedly into the fire.

"MacGuire said Mira was 3.8

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

around nine o'clock and still going up. Wouldn't be surprised if it reached 2. One of brightest maxima on record."

Dagny was in rapture.

"Oh, Robert, I'm so happy for you."

Bob was silent.

"That will show them. You *were* right!"

Bob slowly shook his head.

"No, I was wrong."

"Wrong?"

"You see, I predicted *Mira* would brighten. But Mira's still a minimum."

"But —"

"It's Mira's little *companion* flared up. Mira's pale-blue ghost."

"Oh, *that!*"

"MacGuire says it's a new type star. What he calls a *simmering nova.*"

Dagny gestured impatiently.

"Oh, call it anything. *Quelle difference?* You said Mira would brighten. And it did brighten."

Bob sank deeper into the cushions.

"Sorry. But there can be no double-dealing in science. In science a thing is either wrong or true. If it is wrong, it is wrong. If it is true, it is the truest thing in the world." He laughed. "But who would have supposed Mira's little ghost ...."

His voice trailed off as he gazed deeper into the glowing embers.

"'There are ghosts everywhere,'" Dagny mused. "'They are as thick as the sands of the sea. Every time I open a newspaper, I think I see ghosts creeping between the lines.'"

She rested her head on Bob's shoulder.

"I love you, Robert," she said.

COMING NEXT MONTH

A brand new Black Widowers story by *Isaac Asimov.* It's a unique blend of sf and detection entitled "Earthset and Evening Star." Also, new stories by *Avram Davidson, Ron Goulart, Robert F. Young* and others. The August issue is on sale July 1.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TITANIC SURPRISE

I keep watching, with more or less apprehension, for scientific discoveries that may completely knock out some article I have previously written. It happens every once in a while, and though I should be, and *am*, delighted to see scientific advance convert the more speculatively wrong into the less speculatively more likely right, I am also human enough to mourn the dead article.

Well, mourn with me! Back in the May 1962 F & SF, I wrote an article entitled "By Jove!" which eventually appeared in my essay collection *View From A Height* (Doubleday, 1963). In it I followed the speculations of Carl Sagan to the effect that the greenhouse effect might give Jupiter a comfortable temperature with a dense atmosphere and a vast mild ocean, both containing just the kind of compounds that would easily develop into life structures. I even calculated that the mass of living matter in Jupiter's oceans might be so great as to be equal to 1/8 the total mass of our Moon.

Alas! From the data sent back by the Jupiter probe, Pioneer 10, it looks as though the vision of a comfortable Jupiter is wrong. The planet is, essentially, an enormous

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

drop of liquid hydrogen at more than white-hot temperature. Merely 1,000 kilometers below the frigid far-below-zero of the cloud layers, the temperature is already 3,600°C, and that temperature continues to rise to some 54,000°C. at the center.

Under Earthly conditions, liquid hydrogen boils at -235°C, just twenty degrees above absolute zero; but Jovian pressures keep it liquid at temperatures well above the surface temperature of the Sun.

We can still imagine Jovian life, of course. As the temperature rises from the frigid clouds downward, it must pass through a level where the temperature is Earth-comfortable. The liquid hydrogen, with its ammonia/methane/etc. impurities, rises and falls in a slow majestic circulation and may take a year to rise through the tepid-zone and somewhere turn and take another year to fall through it again.

If there is life on Jupiter, it may inhabit those rising and falling columns, switching from rise to fall when the temperature gets too low and from fall to rise when it gets too high.

Still, the mood has come upon me to seek another world for my ebullient interest in unlikely life-homes, so I think I'll go over the worlds of the Solar system with some care, dividing them by mass-range. For the sake of neatness, I will use a rising scale of ten — 1, 10, 100, 1,000, 10,000, and 100,000 — for dividing lines. To achieve interesting results I will set the mass of our dear old Moon (73,500,000,000,000,000,000,000 kilograms) equal to 1.

Let us start at the upper end of the scale and consider objects with masses of more than 100,000M (that is more than 100,000 times the mass of the Moon).

The only object of this sort in the Solar system is the Sun, which has a mass of 27,000,000M. It is, of course, a star and is gaseous throughout. For the most part, it is an atomic gas of the type we know on Earth except for the fact of its enormously high temperature. Toward the center of the Sun, the temperature is high enough to break down the atoms and produce a nuclear gas.

White dwarf stars are mostly nuclear gas; neutron stars are a sort of nuclear solid, and black holes are who-knows-what; but for the most part, the stars are gas of the variety we now know as "plasma" because the chipping effects of high temperature produce electrically-charged atomic fragments.

Astronomers are agreed that any mass of matter higher than a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

certain critical amount ends as a star, once it compresses sufficiently under the pull of its own gravitational field. If the mass is high enough, the pressures and temperatures at the center will reach the ignition-point of nuclear fusion and that will turn the object into a hot gas.

Exactly what that star-making critical amount of mass may be cannot be said very precisely because, for one thing, it varies somewhat with the properties of the mass. Still, an object with only a tenth the mass of the Sun would still be a star, albeit a "red dwarf," producing only enough heat to make the surface red-hot.

Smaller objects might be gaseous "infra-red dwarfs," not quite hot enough to shine visibly. None of these have been unequivocally observed as far as I know, but that is not surprising. They must be so small and deliver so little energy that detection would be difficult indeed.

Yet perhaps we have done so without quite realizing it. Consider that Jupiter is apparently almost massive enough to fulfill the requirement. It radiates three times as much energy into space as it receives from the Sun, and this may just possibly be due to very small quantities of fusion at its center — fusion that may help keep the ball of liquid as hot as it is.

If Jupiter, then, were a little larger, more fusion might take place — enough to make the mass a dense gas that would be markedly warm if not quite red-hot at the surface. But do we know any object larger (but not very much larger) than Jupiter?

Yes, we do. The faint, rather nearby star, 61 Cygni, is actually a binary star, with the individuals termed 61 Cygni A and 61 Cygni B. In 1943, the Dutch-American astronomer Peter Van de Kamp reported one of those stars to be wobbling slightly and deduced the gravitational effect of a dark companion, 61 Cygnic, a planet about eight times as massive as Jupiter. If so, its mass is about 200,000M, and it is my guess that, if this is correct, it is an infra-red dwarf star.

Let's pass on, though, to the next stage, that between 100,000M and 10,000M.

In this range there falls only one known object, the planet Jupiter, which has a mass of 26,000M. Even if it is large enough to start a few fugitive fusion reactions at its center, the energy generated in this fashion is not enough to render it gaseous — so it is a liquid body. We might call it a sub-star, perhaps, rather than a giant planet.

In the range between 10,000M and 1,000M, there fall three known bodies:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Saturn	7,750M
Neptune	1,400M
Uranus	1,200M

Saturn's density is known to be only about half that of Jupiter. The easiest way of explaining that is to suppose it to be partly gas. Its lesser mass and, therefore, its less intense gravitational field can, perhaps, not compress its hydrogen as tightly and allows much of it to evaporate as a gas.

Uranus and Neptune are roughly as dense as Jupiter. Their lower temperatures may allow more of their structure to be liquid even though their gravitational fields are considerably less intense than those of the two larger planets. Yet there may be substantial quantities of gas there. I would assume planets in this range to be liquid/gas in their makeup.

In the range from 1000M down to 100M, we find ourselves faced with a surprising situation. There are no known bodies in the Solar system in that mass range. None!

Is that just coincidence, or is there significance to it? Could it be that the value of 100M (or something in the neighborhood) is a critical mass?

Could it be, for instance, that if any object condenses into a compact body and has a mass less than 100M it lacks a gravitational field sufficiently intense to collect and retain the hydrogen that makes up the large majority of the general cosmic cloud out of which stars and planets formed? In that case the object would have to remain small and less than 100M in mass, since it must be made out of non-hydrogen material to begin with, and there isn't enough of that to do much with.

On the other hand, if a compact object happens to be more massive than 100M, it may possess a gravitational field sufficiently intense to pick up some quantities of hydrogen from the cosmic cloud. The more it picks up, the greater its mass, the more intense its gravitational field, and the more easily it can pick up still more hydrogen. At masses over 100M, in other words, you would get a "snowball effect" and end up with a body of more than 1000M.

It could be for that reason, then, that there are objects less than 100M and objects more than 1000M and nothing in between.

Next let us move to the other end of the scale, that of objects less than 1M. If we consider known bodies that have masses smaller than that of the Moon, we can list most of the satellites of the Solar system, some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hundreds of thousands of asteroids, and uncounted numbers of meteoroids and micrometeoroids.

What they all have in common is that they are solid. Their gravitational fields are far too weak to hold to their surfaces any molecules that, at the prevailing temperatures, are gaseous or liquid. The only matter that can make up such small bodies are metallic or rocky substances made up of atoms held together by interatomic electromagnetic interactions which are enormously stronger than the gravitational interactions such small bodies can produce.

If the body is cold enough it may also be made up of solid substances which at Earthly temperatures are usually thought of as liquid or gas. Such solid volatiles are called "ices".

The only exceptions to this rule of solidity among the minor objects are the comets. Comets formed originally in regions far beyond the planetary orbits, where Solar radiation is small enough to be ignored and where the temperature is probably not far above the general level of the background radiation of the Universe — which is only three degrees above absolute zero, or -270° C.

Under those circumstances, everything but helium is a solid, and the comets are made up of rocky gravel interspersed with ices, with, in some cases, a rocky core at the center. As long as the rock-ice comets remain in their trans-Plutonian orbits, they are permanent solid bodies, as permanent as the asteroids ringing the Sun between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter.

When, however, gravitational perturbations from the distant stars or the inner planets, cause particular comets to take up elongated orbits that carry them into the inner Solar system and relatively near the Sun, the ices evaporate. The object is then solid/gas (or solid/dust/gas).

The comet's gravitational field, being virtually nil, cannot hold any dust or gas that forms, and it would quickly diffuse into space and spread through the cometary orbit. As a matter of fact, it is swept away by the Solar wind. At each pass near the Sun, more of its substance is swept away, and, in the twinkling of an eye on the geologic time scale, it is reduced to the rocky core if it has one, or to nothing if it hasn't.

We might, then, say that any *permanent* object of mass less than 1M is solid.

Let's move back to the ranges we have skipped. In the range from 100M to 10M, we know exactly two bodies, both planets, and they are:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Earth	81.6M
Venus	69.1M

Earth and Venus are largely solid, like the bodies of less than 1M mass, but they have gravitational fields intense enough to retain a gaseous envelope, thin by comparison with the atmospheres of the larger bodies, but significantly thick just the same.

Venus is so hot that none of the major components of its volatile matter can exist as a liquid. It is a solid/gas object.

Earth is cool enough to have water in the liquid state and in large quantity. It is a solid/liquid/gas body. We could argue that life as we know it can only form on a solid/liquid/gas body, though that may just mark our own parochial feelings as to what is right and proper.

In the range from 10M to 1M there exist nine known bodies, three planets and six satellites:

Mars	9.0M
Pluto	9.0M
Mercury	4.5M
Ganymede	2.0M
Titan	1.6M
Triton	1.5M
Callisto	1.4M
Io	1.2M
Moon	1.0M

The distinction between planet and satellite is a rather arbitrary one, and it seems a shame to lump a large body like Ganymede with an insignificant one like Deimos. I would suggest that the nine bodies in this range be called "sub-planets."

The most massive of the sub-planets, Mars, does possess an atmosphere, but a thin one. The Martian atmosphere is only a hundredth as dense as that of Earth and only a ten-thousandth as dense as that of Venus. And yet the Martian atmosphere is thick enough to produce mists on occasion, to support dust storms, to provide protection against meteorites — so it deserves the name. It is solid/gas.

The least massive of the sub-planets, the Moon, is usually considered to have no atmosphere. Actually, space in the immediate neighborhood of its surface has a density of individual atoms higher than that in regions of outer space far from any large body so that it might be said to have a "trace-atmosphere", one about a trillionth as dense as that of the Earth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This would produce no noticeable effects of the type we generally associate with atmospheres, and so for our purposes we will ignore it and think of the Moon as simply solid.

What about the bodies in between? Where is the boundary line between atmosphere and no atmosphere?

The boundary line is hard to draw because in the sub-planet range it depends not only on the mass of the body, but on its temperature. The higher the temperature, the more rapidly the atoms and molecules of gases move and the more readily they escape into outer space. A given body in the sub-planetary range might retain an atmosphere if it were far from the Sun, and not do so if it were near the Sun but otherwise changed. — So let's consider this matter in greater detail.

In the inner Solar system the only substances likely to form a substantial atmosphere are water, carbon dioxide and nitrogen.* In the outer Solar system, the only substances likely to form substantial atmospheres on sub-planets are water, ammonia, and methane.

Of the sub-planets, only Mercury, Moon, and Mars are in the inner Solar system. Mercury is not much hotter than Venus, which has a thick atmosphere. Mercury, however, has only 1/15 the mass of Venus, and it lacks the gravitational power to turn the trick. As a cold body it would certainly retain an atmosphere of some sort, but near to the Sun as it is, it cannot. It has at best only a trace-atmosphere.

Mars, which has twice the mass of Mercury and is much colder, has no trouble retaining an atmosphere. At its low temperature, water is frozen into an ice, and so its atmosphere contains only carbon dioxide and (probably) nitrogen.

Let us move outward, then, and consider the six sub-planets of the outer Solar system. No less than three of them, Ganymede, Callisto, and Io, are satellites of Jupiter. (There is a fourth sizable satellite of Jupiter, Europa, but it is less massive than the other three and, with a mass of 0.6M, falls below the sub-planetary range and by my admittedly arbitrary standards, must be classified as a "minor object.")

Jupiter is 5.2 times as far from the Sun as Earth is, and the temperatures in its satellite system are low enough not only to freeze water (which freezes at 0° C.) but ammonia as well (which freezes at -33° C.)

**I don't mention oxygen because that is not likely to exist in the atmosphere of any world that doesn't bear life. On Earth, it is the product of plant photosynthesis.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

As a matter of fact, Ganymede and Callisto have densities only half that of the Moon and only a third that of the Earth. This can be so only if something less dense than rock makes up a sizable portion of their volumes. It may be then that these sub-planets are made up largely of ices (water and ammonia).

As for Io (and Europa, too) their densities are about that of the Moon, so that they may be largely rock. In their cases, though, the surfaces, at least, are probably covered by a frost of ices.

With water and ammonia eliminated, that leaves only methane as an atmospheric component. Methane doesn't liquefy till a temperature of -162°C. is reached and doesn't freeze till one of -182°C. is reached. At the temperatures of Jupiter's satellites, then, it is still a gas; and, at that temperature, the gravitational fields of those satellites is still insufficient to hold it. The Jovian satellites, therefore, have not more than trace-atmospheres.

(The trace-atmosphere of Io has definitely been detected. It is about a billionth as dense as Earth's, but a thousand times as dense as that of the Moon. Oddly enough, it contains sodium, but trace atmospheres can have all sorts of odd components. Substantial ones have to be more serious.)

There are three sub-planets in the regions beyond Jupiter. These three are, in order of increasing distance, Titan (the largest satellite of Saturn), Triton (the largest satellite of Neptune) and Pluto (the farthest known object in the Solar system other than comets).

Pluto and Triton are both so far from the Sun that their temperatures are low enough to freeze even methane. The only substances that will remain gaseous at Tritonian and Plutonian temperatures are hydrogen, helium, and neon, and these are so light that even at such low temperatures, the gravitational fields of the sub-planets are not likely to hold more than traces.

Both bodies are so distant (at their closest each is more than 4,000,000,000 kilometers away) that we are not likely to get direct evidence concerning this for quite a while.

Which leaves us only with Titan —

Titan is the second most massive satellite in the Solar system, second only to Ganymede, and that is a useful property to have if we are looking for an atmosphere. Titan's temperature is about -150° C., fifteen degrees lower than that of Ganymede and the other Jovian satellites. At Titan's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

temperature, methane is still gaseous, but it is pretty close to its liquefaction point and its molecules are sluggish indeed.

At Titan's temperature, methane could freeze in the form of a loose compound with water, then be released by what internal heat Titan might have, and then be held on to by Titan's gravitational field. The combination of Titan's mass and low temperature would do the trick.

In 1944, the Dutch-American astronomer Gerard Peter Kuiper detected an atmosphere about Titan and found it to consist of methane. Although nowadays we can work out why this is so in hindsight, it was, at the time of discovery a titanic surprise (aha!). What's more, the atmosphere is a substantial one, very likely denser than that of Mars.

Titan is the only satellite in the Solar system known to have a real atmosphere, and the only body in the Solar system to have an atmosphere that is primarily methane.* Methane has been detected in the atmospheres of Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune, but there it exists as a minor component of atmospheres that are primarily hydrogen.

Methane (CH_4) is a carbon compound, and carbon is a unique element.** Methane molecules (unlike those of water and ammonia) can break up under the lash of Solar radiation and recombine into larger molecules. Thus, Pioneer 10 has located in Jupiter's atmosphere not only methane itself, but ethane (C_2H_6), ethylene (C_2H_4) and acetylene (C_2H_2). Undoubtedly, more complicated molecules, with more carbon atoms, exist also, but in successively lower concentrations that make them more difficult to detect. It could be broken fragments of such more complicated carbon compounds that produce the brown and yellow bands on Jupiter, and which account for the orange color of Saturn's equatorial regions.

In the giant-planetary atmospheres, however, methane molecules encounter each other relatively rarely, since the superabundant hydrogen molecules get in the way. On Titan, where the atmosphere is almost entirely methane, the reactions may take place more easily. To be sure, more slowly than they would on Earth, for instance, but the reactions,

---

There is also hydrogen in Titan's atmosphere, it has recently been found, and since Titan's gravitational field can't hold hydrogen, an interesting theory has been worked out to account for its presence, but that's another story.

**See THE ONE AND ONLY (F & SF, November 1972)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

however slow they might be, have had almost five billion years of time in which to proceed.

It may, therefore, turn out that Titan's atmosphere has, as minor constituents, a very complicated mix of organic gases that is responsible for the satellite's orange color. Titan may, indeed, possess an orange cloud cover that completely hides its surface. As for that hidden surface, it may be covered with a hydrocarbon tar or sludge. Or there may be an ocean of hydrocarbons dissolved in methane (the solution liquefying at a higher temperature than methane itself would), so that Titan might be covered by a petroleum sea.

And might these organic compounds, based on a world that like Earth, might be solid/liquid/gas, work up into very complex and versatile compounds of a type we know nothing of because they would be too fragile to exist at Earth-temperatures? Can there be a cold methane-based life on Titan, to supply us, someday with *another* titanic surprise?

Addendum: You might as well have a summary of my classification of astronomical bodies in this article:

	class of object	physical state	typical example
	stars	gas	Sun
100,000M			
	sub-stars	liquid	Jupiter
10,000M			
	giant planets	liquid/gas	Saturn
1,000M			
	(empty)		
100M			
	planets	solid/liquid/gas	Earth
		solid/gas	Venus
10M			
	sub-planets	solid/liquid/gas	Titan
		solid/gas	Mars
		solid	Ganymede
1M			
	minor objects	solid/gas	Halley's Comet
		solid	Europa

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If you think you're living under stress, consider please this story about one bad — even murderous — day in the life of an executive of the future.

A Day In The Apotheosis Of The Welfare State

by PHYLLIS MACLENNAN

Finished with this day's tasks, he put the computer on stand-by and glanced out the window.

They were waiting for him again.

He could see only two cars, one at each side of the gate; but he knew there were more, concealed in side roads, ready to pounce. From up here on the third floor, gazing out and down across the vast expanse of cracked, weed-veined concrete that had once been a parking lot, the two small oval personal electrics, one red, one yellow, looked like ladybugs: cute, and harmless; but their intentions weren't harmless.

He glanced around the familiar, uncluttered room, half wishing there would be some trifle he could attend to, to postpone his leaving a few minutes longer, but there was nothing. The computer hummed and chuckled to itself, settling down for the night, a drowsy pattern of lights flickering across the console as it switched an incoming message to its hold banks. He gave it a companionable pat, and it seemed to him that the light that sparked on the screen just at that moment was a friendly wink good night, that the machine wished him luck on his journey home.

He sighed, shrugged his shoulders, and left the building, plodding stoically across the short distance to the executive parking area where his Special stood, looking as alone, exposed, and vulnerable as he felt. He belted himself in, locked the doors, made sure the windows were rolled up, and clicked the power on. As he did so, an involuntary shiver ran down his spine. His scalp tightened, his palms were sweaty, his stomach knotted with tension as he slipped into forward and eased down on the accelerator. He touched the remote

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

control as he approached the gate, watched it slowly rise. Beyond it, the two Standards whined like vicious dogs on leash. How could such innocent things look lethal? It was absurd. They were like Dodgem toys, with wide rubber bumpers all around, painted in carnival colors, the men inside them laughing and waving as he slipped under the gate and it clanged down like a portcullis, locking safety behind him.

They edged forward; eager; expectant. From the red car, on his left, the driver leaned out: a square, brutish face, big horse teeth bared in a grin that betrayed its kinship to the snarl.

"Hey, *pinball!*" he bellowed. "Didja think we forgotcha?"

"Back off!" the driver on the right shouted. "My honors!" He let out a whoop and aimed at the victim. He hadn't time to get up much speed, the impact was hardly more than a nudge. But the red car was ready, it caught him angling from the rear and bounced him off the foot-high curb. The hunt was on.

They shunted him forward, one to another, fell back at the first intersection. A turquoise-blue job came barreling from the left at its top forty mph, slammed him amidships, knocked him down the street to the right toward a rainbow barrier of enemies. They wanted him to charge them, to try to fight his way through. He wasn't about to oblige. He snaked around, picked up speed, slithered past Turquoise Blue, out onto the main street. Red and Yellow cut that off. Red hit him, knocked him sideways; Yellow blocked him off; the others caught up.

They chivvied him from point to point, their goal to keep him from reaching home and Angie as long as their power lasted. For his part, he strained to play a passive role, not to give them the satisfaction of making him lose his head. His only tactic was to endure, unresisting, until they ran out of juice and were forced to stop.

Intent on his driving, on not getting hurt — which took more skill than he thought them able to appreciate — he lost track of time. Turned like a sheep, he debouched unexpectedly on one of the main roads. Four lanes lay open before him, deliciously inviting: not a single car in sight, clear out of town. His hand itched to shove the switch to full power. In fifteen seconds he could be up to seventy and flying down that open stretch so fast, by the time the bastards got their mouths closed he'd be out of sight....And what good would that do? He'd only have to come back — or abandon his future, and his wife.... He slowed down, flicking watchful eyes to either side, braced

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for attack. How soon? From which direction? ... Christ. Head-on. The turquoise-blue hero had turned out two blocks ahead and was laboring to reach full speed; he'd be doing his limit of forty by the time they met. ... Hold still and make him veer off? Wait until the last minute and then spin to one side? Intent as a matador when the bull has begun his charge, he didn't see the one that hit him from the rear. He was caromed off the curb into the oncoming vehicle, spun around, slammed into the curb again. He cut his speed, let them keep butting him straight ahead. They got bored with that pretty quickly, as a rule. They wanted him to run, to dodge — or to attack; but he would not let them goad him into losing control.

Animals! he thought, gritting his teeth, trying to hold back his anger. *Animals!*

Forcing himself to calm, he let them herd him forward until they did at last drop back, vanishing around corners to lay new ambushes ahead. The next right would lead him home, they were sure to be blocking that ... but they weren't. Surprised, he checked the time. A quarter to six already! He hadn't realized it was that late. He'd been running for more than an hour. The game was over — until next time. His hands relaxed on the wheel. He was wringing wet, drenched with sweat, but the childish ordeal was finished for today. All he had to dread now was facing Angie. He drove slowly home, past the rows of democratically duplicated ideal houses, each on its mat of plastic grass, protected by foot-high parapets, neatly spaced like synthetic dewdrops on the spiderweb of streets spun out from the plant at its center. A jumble of scooters blocked the driveway of the one that was his own: that would be Angie's friends, come to commiserate with her over her sad lot, married to an outsider, being squeezed out of the group she'd always been part of by his eccentricities. He didn't intend to crouch in the car and wait until they left, as he thought they expected him to, shamed pygmy that he was in their eyes. He went in, straight to the den, and poured himself a drink. How long could he go on taking this? His contract had two more years to run. He could beg off saying it was for Angie's sake, the strain was too much for her, she was being ostracized, something like that ... but it was for her sake that he had to stay. If he stuck out the term of his contract, he was sure of promotion. He'd have enough status then so Angie would be secure in his world. At the levels this job opened up for him they wouldn't dare snub his wife, he'd have too much power.

LICENSED TO OINK.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

... Hell. The dumb broads had left, sneaking past him, out on the lawn now, screeching like a flock of starlings as they said good-by, kisses twittered into empty air beside each others' cheeks, woman-fashion.

She came reluctantly to greet him, steadfastness shaken by loyalty to her girlhood chums. Her kiss was absent-minded, almost indifferent.

"All right, get it off your chest. They've been at you again, haven't they?" She hadn't said anything, but he was already angry, defensive, eager to beat her to the punch. "What was their sage advice this time? Did they tell you to threaten to leave me? Or turn off the sex until I behave?"

"They didn't mention you at all."

"They don't have to. They just look at you? 'Poor little Angie, married to a yellow-belly tech.'"

"Well, why don't you show them you're not?" she flared. "Why don't you try to make friends with them? You could go down to the men's club, at least. Have a few beers, shoot a couple of games of pool, talk to them —"

"*Talk* to them! Are you out of your mind? What can they talk about? Those second-rate studs couldn't get a degree in coloring inside the lines!"

She reddened, challeneged him, round little chin lifted defiantly.

"They're not dumb! I ought to know, I'm one of them, remember? Techs aren't any better than us, you're flesh and blood, the same as we are, and we're *not* dumb!"

"You don't understand." He was exasperated, having to explain what was obvious to him. He wouldn't have to draw diagrams for a tech woman, she'd know what he meant. "I never said all plebes are born stupid. It's the way they live. They spend their lives letting mana fall from the sky on them, like members of a Cargo Cult whose prayers have been answered. What good is a brain if you don't use it? If you don't put anything in, how can anything come out?"

"Why don't you teach them, then, instead of sneering at them all the time?"

"The schools are open, they can go if they want to. Clods like your brother don't want to. There's a perfect example for you: if he can't drink it or screw it, he doesn't want to know about it. And that's the truth."

Her eyes filled with tears. He hated that, it made him feel as if he had been bullying her.

"Tom's good, you know he's good! He'd do anything for a friend, and he wanted to be your friend, but you wouldn't let him," she sniffled. "You keep putting everybody down, but it's all in your

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mouth. Why don't you make them respect you? Show them you're not a coward. If you'd stand up to them when they make you pinball, instead of letting them chase you all over town, if you'd prove you're a man by their standards —"

He stared at her, incredulous.

"You can't be serious! You mean that's how they make contact? Like little kids? If I beat them at pinball, I prove I'm a man among men, and then we can be buddies? Oh, no, sweetheart. Not me. That's —"

"— beneath your dignity," she finished for him bitterly. "Are you such a Christian, to keep on turning the other cheek? Haven't you any pride? Can't you show them you're not afraid of them?"

"But I'm not afraid of them." He was astonished that she should imagine he was. "... You're ashamed of me, aren't you? Do *you* think I'm not a man? Would you rather I were like them?"

She looked down at the floor.

"I love you the way you are." Her voice was low, as if it hurt her to force the words out. "I wouldn't want you to be any different." She looked up at him again, conflict naked in her eyes, almost hating him for putting her in an untenable position. "If you don't want to pinball, why don't you talk to Pop? Tell him what's happening. He'll make them stop."

"I don't have to tell him what's happening. He knows. He thinks it's kind of funny. 'Boys will be boys.'"

"Boys! Some of them are over forty!"

"Sure. Pop's almost seventy, and he'd be out there with them if he thought he could keep up. He doesn't see any harm in it. They're not going to do any real damage; he does draw the line at that. He knows that if anything happens to me they'd have one hell of a tough time getting another tech in here to run the plant. They might not get one at all."

"Oh, that's right. I forgot. You're not a Christian — you're God Himself, aren't you? By Your mercy us poor ignorant peasants survive."

This could go on all night. It had before, and he didn't want to be nagged into saying things to her that he didn't mean and didn't want to say. He put his glass down firmly and started for the door.

"I'll be back in a couple of hours."

"Where are you going? You haven't had dinner!"

"I'm not hungry."

Her face crumpled. Now he *had* upset her. He knew it, he was sorry, but he couldn't help it. He couldn't stay there and fight with her, he didn't *want* to fight. It wouldn't settle anything, it would

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

only widen the gap between them. As he went out and started across the plastic grass, she followed, wringing her hands, begging him to come back, have a bite to eat at least .... Oh, God. The traditional plebe pattern: angry husband stalks out, goes down to the club and gets drunk — except he was going to play chess with the computer.

He stopped short, startled. The "boys" were waiting, maybe twenty of them. He'd left his car on the street, and they'd had time to go somewhere and recharge. They really meant to get him, this time.... Had Angie's friends been in on this? Was that why they had blocked the driveway with their goddamn scooters? No matter. He was fed up to the eyeballs with this idiocy. Maybe this time he *would* run for it. A shot rang out, a bullet whined past his ear. Now, *that* was something new! Angie was still behind him. The bloody fools! They wouldn't shoot at her, of course — if they did, she'd be safer.

"Angie! Go back! Get in the house!"

She hesitated, turned to obey. Two or three of the plebes were shooting now, shouting and laughing. "Come on, tech boy! Dance! Let's see you duck lead!" What *cretins!* He couldn't believe it. Angie was frightened; she had turned again and was running back to him, screaming for him to come in the house. Why didn't she go inside? She might get hurt. As he ran to drag her to safety, he saw her stop, puzzled, and put a hand to her forehand.

He knew. It was like a dream, he was paralyzed, he couldn't move to save her, it was already too late. As her hand slid away, her dazed eyes closed, blood trickled down her face as he crumpled to the ground.

"Angie!"

Dead silence now. The plebes were paralyzed, as stunned as he by what had happened. He had forgotten them, all he could see was Angie, lying on the grass, looking broken.

He picked her up, despairing. She hardly weighed anything, limp in his arms, her head falling back, mouth half-open, dark, perfumed hair floating loose. *Was she dead?* He couldn't tell, he couldn't think, he could only call her name, "Angie! Angie!" and wait, agonized, for her eyes to open, for her to look at him and smile and tell him it was all right, she was still here.

The "boys" milled around in the street, frightened, wanting to escape, yet held by the fascination of the grotesque, the unthinkable crime committed before their very eyes, by one of them. Someone had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED.

called an ambulance. The emergency helicopter flupped in over the roofs, set down beside him. Two attendants ran over, lifted Angie from his unresisting arms, took her away.

He turned to face the plebes. They encircled him, but at a respectable distance, motionless, as if mesmerized. As he looked at them, he noted with detachment that he actually did see red: a brilliant vermilion haze filled his vision, he was blinded by it, he didn't know for how long. When it faded, he was possessed by a clear, cold fury he would have thought himself incapable of, if he had been capable of thought at all.

"All right, you bastards. Get in your cars and run. I'll show you pinball."

He didn't know if he whispered or shouted it, or if he even said it out loud at all; but as he strode to his Special, they scurried like frightened rabbits for their puny little Standard Issues, piling into them pell-mell with shouts and curses: *"Let's get out of here I don't want to get mixed up in this the guy's gone crazy —"*

He got in his car with deliberation, donned the crash helmet he kept in the back but had never worn before, belted himself in. He turned the switch, swung away from the curb.

And started after them.

He didn't mean to scare them, he meant to kill. If it had been a game, he would have showed some sense of fairness. As it was, he hunted them down without mercy, for the vermin they were. They had no chance against him. Fools! They never had had, if they had only had sense enough to realize it and leave him alone. But no. They couldn't quit when they were ahead; they would have to be taught what whipped curs they were, and he taught them.

One by one he picked them off, remorselessly. They were the cowards now, not a grin or a smart remark among them as they bent over the wheels, struggling to get away. Not one of them stood his ground, they made no attempt to band together against him. It was every man for himself, but none of them could escape. He read their feeble minds, and kept two jumps ahead of them all the way. With twice the speed, his vehicle twice as heavy, he met them at every turn, sent them spinning and crashing into each other, slamming off the high curbs, turning turtle. They were dazed and battered and bleeding, helpless, more than willing to surrender; but he wouldn't stop.

Only the communicator stopped him. It had been shrilling "Emergency!" at him for some time before he pressed the button.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"...your wife. She's conscious, she's calling for you. Come to the hospital immediately."

He scowled at it, slow to cool down. Was it a trick? Some subterfuge to call him off? They put Angie on. Yes, that was Angie. He knew her voice, even though she sounded weak.

"Pete, please come. Pete, I'm frightened. I need you."

He picked his way among the wrecks. Clear of them, the road to the hospital was free of all obstructions. Angie was lying on the starchy-white bed, a starchy-white bandage around her head, smiling at him, awed, adoring.

"Oh, Pete! You did it for *me!*"

He winced. Why did she have to say that? He wished she hadn't. He didn't want to talk about it at all, and certainly not in platitudes. But she was alive, and he was grateful for that.

"I thought they'd killed you," he said, wondering.

"So did I." She giggled. "The doctor said I probably only fainted because I was so sure I was dead. It's only a scratch, really. It was a ricochet. The bullet was spent when it hit me. I got 'creased,' like in a movie." She seemed to enjoy the idea.

"And you're all right."

The situation called from some dramatic statement from him, he could see she expected it, but he couldn't think of any. What did they say in movies at times like this? He was relieved to have the nurse interrupt.

"The mayor's here," she said officiously. "He wants to personally make sure your wife's all right. Shall I tell him to come in?"

"Of course." Angie was flattered by the attention.

The nurse held the door open, and Pop shuffled in.

"Well, now, there, little girl." Oh, he was paternal — hard to believe he wasn't in any way related. "Feeling better?"

"Oh, I'm fine. It wasn't anything. I was just scared, is all. I can go home tomorrow."

She beamed, he beamed, he patted her hand affectionately, then turned to her naughty husband. His faded old eyes were reproachful, watery, with real tears, or was it only age?

"Well, now. You did a lot of damage, boy. You know that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, can't say I blame you, your wife shot and all. But you went kind of far."

"I thought they'd killed her."

"Yeah, I know. She coulda been killed, but she wasn't. All's well that ends well." He took out a man-sized tissue, wiped his eyes, blew his nose vigorously. "But I got something to say to you — all of you, you're not the only one .... It's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

one thing, pinballing around a little, once in a while — but you're playing too rough. I mean, cars smashed up, injuries, your wife hurt. You boys are going to have to cut that out from now on. That's an order, hear?"

"Yes, sir."

There was nothing more to say. Pop took his leave; the nurse came in to put Angie to sleep for the night. He kissed her, left her lying there peaceful and happy, and walked slowly out, Pop's words echoing in his ears:

"You boys."

He was one of them, now. He had proved himself. Angie was proud. They wouldn't harass him any more.

... But he? What did he feel? A certain satisfaction, yes, like swatting the fly that buzzes around your face. Nothing he would brag about ... A sense of part of himself lost, his soul somehow shrunk to a smaller dimension ...

He had been playing his own game with them, and they had won. They had baited him and baited him until at last they forced him down among them. ...He had demeaned himself.

He walked down the steps from the hospital to his battered car. There was no one in sight. He had known there wouldn't be. They would never be there again, lying in wait for him. He could drive home, now, and from home to the plant and back, and anywhere he wanted. No pinballers would ever ambush him again. He knew that.

It tasted somehow, strangely, of defeat.

("*Films,*" *from page 97*)

great fantasy, "The Blue Bird," is indeed being filmed in a multi-million dollar production in Leningrad, with a cast including Elizabeth Taylor, Jane Fonda, Cicely Tyson, Ava Gardner, and Maya Plisetskaya. If the stage directions (which are as enthralling to read as the action) are paid attention to, it would be the epic fantasy film of all time.

And how about a movie about the last exploit of an aging Robin Hood, starring Sean Connery as RH and Audrey Hepburn as Maid Marion, directed by Richard (*Help!, The Three Musketeers*) Lester. Hang in there, fans of the celluloid dream. It may all be coming back.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Acrostic Puzzle by Georgia F. Adams

This puzzle contains a quotation from a work in science fiction. First, guess as many of the clues as you can and write the word or words in the numbered blanks opposite the clues. Put those letters in the matching blocks in the puzzle. If your words are correct, you will see words forming in the puzzle blocks. Fill in the missing letters and put them in the numbered spaces opposite the clues. That will help you guess those words and therefore get more of the puzzle, and so on. You don't need to be familiar with the quotation in order to work the puzzle. The first letters of the correctly answered clues will spell out the name of the author and the title of the work from which the quotation is taken.

A. A crucifix
___ ___ ___ ___
51 66 96 19

B. A group of eight
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
57 86 12 42 115 26

C. He's also known as William Atheling, Jr.
___ ___ ___ ___ ___
29 68 27 94 61

D. _____ *of Tomorrow*
___ ___ ___ ___
3 69 73 45

E. Willard Libby won a Nobel prize because he could do this
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
4 6 85 25 41 18

F. de Camp followers should like this one
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
1 65 75 114 120 130 137 30 102 97 34 39 132

G. Q wrote about this aspect of space
___ ___ ___ ___ ___
64 2 15 99 91

H. The Piltdown man was one
___ ___ ___ ___
108 111 117 90

I. *Black* _____ by C
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
142 89 127 95 84 74

J. *Robots Have No Tails,* but these do
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
49 44 141 93 77 16

K. Author of *Not This August*
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
17 100 113 126 81 24 67 43 92

L. Imaginary line on earth and in space
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
138 76 8 54 38 80 88 5

M. Kind of cheese
___ ___ ___ ___
11 48 50 14

N. _____ *All Alone*
___ ___ ___ ___ ___
53 112 122 129 103

O. Author of *Commune 2000 AD*
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
20 13 23 33 35 70 116 47 121 82 98 135

P. Image
___ ___ ___ ___
134 139 79 7

Q. See G
___ ___ ___ ___ ___
22 62 58 87 106

R. Marred
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
110 72 37 21 56 59 78

S. He wrote an adaptation of *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*
___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___ ___
63 107 128 71 123 9 140 55

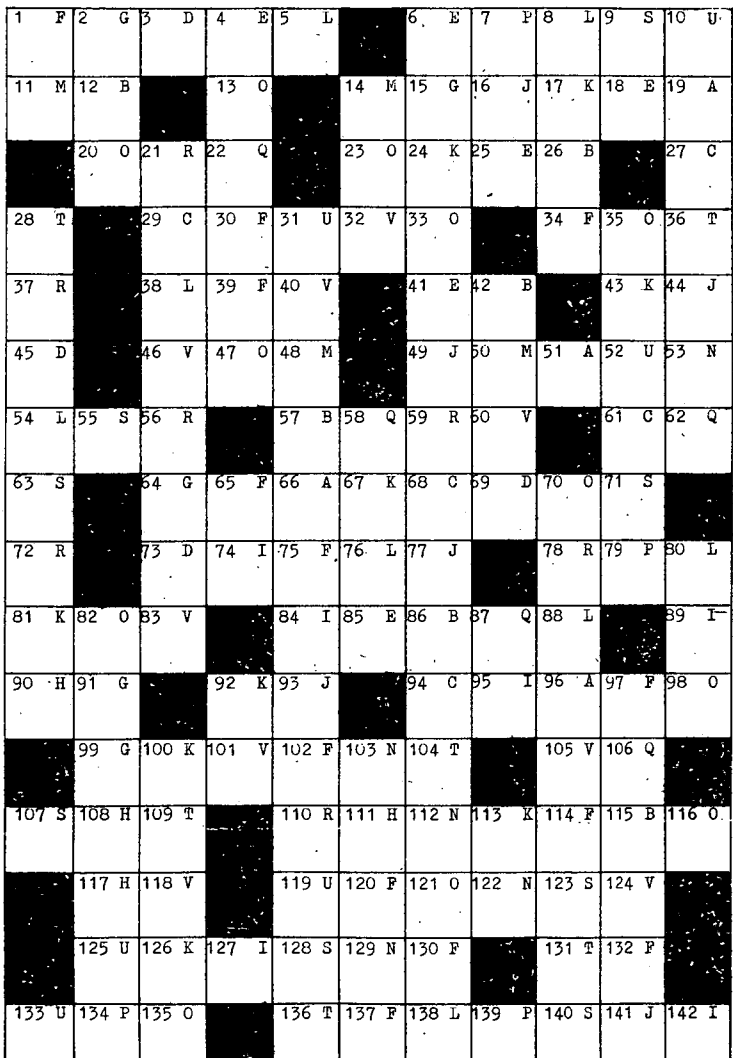
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

T. _____ *Star-*
Actually a Tenn one — 136 131 36 104 109 28

U. He had a rendezvous with a Nebula — 31 10 119 133 125 52

V. Author of *Star Rider* — 40 105 118 32 124 83 60 101 46

Solution will appear in the August issue.



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

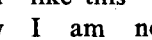
Steve Barr lives in Woodstock, which is great birding country and must have its charms for writers of fantasy. Take, for instance, this tale of Corwin Ravenscroft, who let his empathy for the creatures get quite out of hand.

For The Birds

by STEPHEN BARR

My name is Corwin Ravenscroft and I live in Woodstock, N.Y. I am a bachelor, and in my spare time I have for years been a bird watcher — or, as we say, a birder. I think that, next to the adorable chickadee, the crow is the one I feel the greatest empathy toward. The magic of migrating geese, flying overhead in a beautiful vee, is something different — and their conversation is part of their plan and their direction toward their winter or summer Mecca. Perhaps it is my name that caused my first interest in crows — that and their wonderful nests. Some scientist once claimed to have proved that crows can count up to more than six — a terrific improvement over primtive man — but I firmly believe all birds can count, *and* talk, and I don't mean parrots and myna birds when they are jokingly imitating our speech and other silly noises.

In Woodstock there are quite a number of birders — even among the new young people, who seem to be very loving of animals. Some, it is true, may occasionally fish, but I don't know of any really young hunters.

One morning recently I was in a field near my cottage on the Maverick Road and caught my foot on something sticking out of the ground. I bent over and pulled it loose — it seemed to be somewhat corroded metal, judging from its weight, and was in the shape of a tiny antique oil lamp. I took it back to the cottage and washed it as well as I could, and as I rubbed it an odd bluish little cloud seemed to come out of it. Then I noticed what seemed to be a faint carved inscription on the side that looked like this 
I am no scholar of foreign languages, but the symbols looked familiar, and I looked up the list of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

foreign alphabets in my dictionary, and, sure enough, it was Arabic and would be pronounced Wun wish fer a day. One wish? At that moment a shadow appeared on the window, and I saw a large crow that had perched on the sill. He — or she — preened her feathers, looking in at me, and then flew away to the top of a very tall hemlock nearby down the hill. "Oh, how I wish I was a crow!" I muttered and suddenly realized I must have fallen over. Anyway, I was very near the floor; then I saw the lamp, which had miraculously grown — it was as long as my forearm. I reached towards it in amazement and then saw that what I was extending was a huge bird's claw. I looked down at myself and saw that a beak projected from my face and my front was covered with black shiny feathers. I was a bird....

Then I flew — yes, flew —to the big mirror and saw I was a crow. My wish had been granted. Now the problem was to get outside. I wasn't able to turn the front doorknob with my claw, and all the windows had screens on them. I remembered the kitchen had a very light screen door that was held shut with a spring, and I got out that way, although the spring had become very strong. I walked across the grass and ate some corn I had thrown out that morning. I heard a flutter, and two enormous—no, just my size—crows lit next to me. "Well, well! Will you look who's here!" said one. "Going to join the gang?"

"I'd be happy and honored to," I said.

"Well, come up with us and we'll have the ceremony."

They took off for the hemlock and I followed. I have always been afraid of heights, but being on my own wings removed all fear. I did a couple of Immelmann turns out of sheer joy and was about to try a loop-the-loop but desisted when I noticed one of my new friends give a raised-eyebrow look to the others.

We landed near the top of the tree, about 200 feet from the ground, and were joined by some ten or fifteen others. I was asked my name and I said it was Corwin. "How about Corbeau?" said one. "That's what they call us in Canada around Quebec."

"All right," I said, and that was that. Then the same crows said, "Raise your wings: do you solemnly swear never to make a pass at anyone else's wife?" I did as asked and said "I do." He gave me a kindly look, and we flew off in various directions to forage for lunch.

I wanted to see if I could communicate with humans, and seeing a friend and near-neighbor in his garden — another birder — I flew over to him and said, "Guess who this is!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He looked at me with surprise and pleasure and said, "Hagget-batter-boo-wuttickle-tat." At least it sounded that way until I suddenly realized he was talking Human, not Crow, and he was saying, "I wonder what this wonderful crow wants." He obviously couldn't understand what I was saying, and so I picked a dandelion and clawed — I mean, handed it to him — and flew off toward the Hudson River, where I turned south. I was on my way to Hastings-on-Hudson where my friend Martin lives. *He* would understand me — he has the most penetrating and analytical mind I know. The only trouble was that he had only recently moved there, and I was unfamiliar with the topography — I knew his address but not the lie of the land. Well, I could still read Human — as I flew down near some billboards, I read them without trouble. I took about an hour to reach my objective, flying mainly over the river and then down to near ground level to read the street signs, but I couldn't locate Euclid Avenue where Martin and his wife lived. I saw some blue jays on a roof and flew down to ask them, but they shrugged without answering when I asked where Euclid Avenue was.

Then I saw some crows and went to them, but they said they were on their way north and didn't know the area. "Ask one of the locals," one said. "Try a woodpecker — there's a long-married couple of pileateds just half a mile over in that direction."

"Couldn't I ask one of the humans?" I asked.

"Are you crazy? They wouldn't understand you. We can all understand them, but that's as far as it goes."

I flew where he had pointed, and by a wonderful coincidence I saw Martin sitting in a garden reading a book and making notes. I zoomed down and landed on the handle of a lawn mower in front of him. "Well, well, well," he said, smiling. For some reason it made him look like a younger Einstein, rather appropriately. I flew around his head a couple of times and landed on his knee, looking into his face. "Charlotte!" he called out. "Come here quick!" But to my sorrow there was no answer — Charlotte, his wife, is one of my favorite people. "She must have gone out," Martin said, half to himself, then to me: "Is there something I can give you to eat?"

I shook my head and reached out my claw and took the pencil from his hand. Then I wrote on the pad on the arm of his chair, "I am Corwin Ravenscroft — I've been turned into a crow." He picked it up and looked at what I'd written and shook his head. I looked at what I'd written and shook *my*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

head — why couldn't he read it?

Then suddenly he said, "You've written, 'Caw caw caw caw caw' — I don't know what it means." I looked again and it seemed plain enough to me. Perhaps Jean Goodall would be able to read it — but where was she? I shook my head again — I had an idea: I pointed with the pencil at various letters on the open page of Martin's book (Bertrand Russell on mathematical logic), and Martin followed me carefully and then again shook his head. "You've indicated 'Caw croak quark cawry caw cawra,' and I can't get it. Come into the kitchen and I'll give you a love-offering." I nodded and we went inside. Martin and his wife collaborate in cooking — a wonderful combination of New England and Paris styles. He took a dish of divine beef Bourguignonne out of the fridge and put it on the table. I stuffed myself until I could hardly stand — I even hiccupped, and Martin said gesundheit. Then I took some matches from a box on the stove and arranged them on the table like this: IIII+IIII=7 and Martin nearly keeled over.

"Great guns — he understands math!" But I realized that numbers wouldn't suffice for communication — it wasn't going to work. I'd better leave; there was no point in getting Martin more and more confused about my identity; I'd better leave. Then I had another idea — flew into his study, and, sure enough, lying on his desk was a letter from me that I had written two days before. When Martin followed me in, I pointed to my signature with a talon and then at myself. "Oh, you know Corwin, do you?" he said, and I shook my head and repeated my gestures with emphasis. "Oh, he knows *you*, is that it?" I shook my head again — it was hopeless. So I flew out through an open window. I stopped and picked a daisy and brought it in to Martin and took off for the Hudson and flew up-river again. When I got home I went to the hemlock to say hello to my new friends. It was getting dark, and I found a perch in the crotch of a high part of the tree and dozed off.

I woke the next morning and found the crotch had become a very tight fit — then, to my horror, I saw my claws had become feet. I was back to human, and naked — stuck 200 feet up from the ground. My fear of height had returned, but the crows guided me handhold by handhold down to the bottom where I found my clothes — I don't know how they got there. As I walked over to the cottage, my neighbor appeared. "Hi, Corwin," he said. "Where were you all yesterday?"

"Birding," I replied not un-

(*continued to page 162*)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARKET PLACE

BOOKS-MAGAZINES

SCIENTIFANTASY specialist: Books, magazines. Free catalog. Gerry de la Ree, 7 Cedarwood, Saddle River, N.J. 07458.

SPECIALISTS: Science Fiction, Fantasy, Weird Fiction, Books, Pocketbooks. Lists issued. Stephen's Book Service, Post Office Box 321, Kings Park, L.I., New York 11754.

BOOK — MAGAZINE READERS! Send title (s) wanted: S&S Books, FS-12 80 North Wilder, St. Paul, Minn. 55104

Send for Free catalog of hardcover science fiction and fantasy books and pulps. Canford Book Corral, Box 216, Freeville, N.Y. 13068.

SF-Fantasy magazines, books, paperbacks. List free. Collections also purchased. Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Drive, Rockville, Md. 20853.

BOOKLOVER? Catlover? Lovelover? Three enchanting Chapbooks; samples, $.25. Bookways, 436-AL Center, Fort Lee, N.J. 07024.

Wanted: Collections of comics, SF and fantasy paperbacks, hardbounds, pulps, magazines, Graham Holroyd, 20 Old Farm Circle, Pittsford, N.Y. 14534.

SPECIALIST IN FANTASY LITERATURE. A complete line of all in-print hardbacks, paperbacks, magazines, comics, posters and fanzines stocked. Used, out-of-print hardbacks, paperbacks, and magazines carried. Free search service. Write to be placed on mailing list. Lois Newman Books, The Compleat Science Fiction and Fantasy Bookshop, 1428 Pearl St., Boulder, Co. 80302.

Illustrated catalog of sf, fantasy, weird tale books. Hundreds of new books. Discounts. Specially priced books. Send $.25 to Purple Unicorn Books, 4532-F4, Duluth, Mn. 55804.

SCIENCE FICTION MYSTERIES (NEW HARDCOVER). Save to 70%. Free Catalog. Spencer Book Company, 336 East 17th Street, Costa Mesa, Calif. 92627.

Something for everyone. Science fiction out of print books, anthologies, fantasies, first editions, burroughs paperbacks, 24 page newspaper size list $.25. HJMR, FSF, P.O. Box 610308, North Miami, Florida 33161.

BACK ISSUES, Assorted dates: Imagination, Astounding, Galaxy, IF, Amazing, Fantastic, F&SF, Analog. 1952 to present. 36 Falmouth Ave., Scarborough, Ontario, Canada.

Supernatural horror, fantasy adventure. Howard, Brennan, Munn, Bunch, many others. Illustrated. First eight issues, $7.00. Subscriptions: 3/$3.50. Sample, $1.00. Information sheet, $.10. Weirdbook, Dept. F, Box 35, Amherst, N.Y. 14226.

S.F. - Fantasy magazines for sale. Free lists. Write: Vernon Wilson, P.O. Box 143, North Judson, Ind. 46366.

WANTED TO BUY - science fiction magazines from 1926 to 1960. Harry Bennett, 6763 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Ca. 90028.

PLANET OF APES, NIGHTSTALKER, STAR TREK original TV scripts for sale. Plus other popular programs, movie scripts, stills. Collectors Book Store, 6763 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood Ca. 90028.

OST FANTASIES reprints rate fantasy fiction by Kline, Howard, Munn, Pendarves, others. Free information. Weinberg, 10533 Kenneth, Oak Lawn, Ill. 60453.

RARE PULPS REPRINTED. The Octopus, The Scorpion, Mysteries Wu Fang, many others, Details free. Weinberg. 10533 Kenneth, Oak Lawn, Ill. 60453.

Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines, typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use the F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $4.00 for minimum of ten (10) words, plus 40 cents for each additional word. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"BONSTONOFAVITCH!" Insane fantasy novel $3.95 perfect bound. Money back guarantee. Do it! Angst World Library, 2307-22nd Ave, East, Seattle, Wa 98112.

SF-FANTASY BOOKS for sale. Free lists. RED DEVIL BOOKS, 35-F Minneapolis Ave., Duluth, Mn. 55803.

Don't miss the ultimate snowblind experiment! December in the Review, 220 Standish #1, Redwood, Ca. 94063.

OPEN TO BUY - Jack Vance, P. K. Dick. Generous. Write for want list. Underwood Bookdealers, 256 A 5th Ave., San Francisco, Ca. 94118.

Astounding, Galaxy, F&SF collection. 1950-73 for sale. E. G. Kimme, 15510 Williams, No. J, Tustin, Calif. 92680 (714) 558.8570.

DIANETICS (R) IS AN ADVENTURE. It is an adventure into Terra Incognita, the human mind, that vast and hitherto unknown realm half an inch back of our foreheads. From DIANETICS: THE MODERN SCIENCE OF MENTAL HEALTH by L. Ron Hubbard (430 pages, hardback). Fight for an anxiety-free future. Buy this book. Send $7.00 to The Church of Scientology (R) 8 W. Lancaster, Ardmore, Pa. 19003. A Dianetics publication. Dianetics is the registered trademark of L. Ron Hubbard in respect of his published works. Copyright (c) 1950, 1975 by L. Ron Hubbard. All rights reserved. Scientology is an applied religious philosophy. Scientology and Dianetics are registered names.

"Games Tricks and Puzzles for a Hand Calculator" 100 pages of fun. $2.85 plus $.50 to Dymax, P.O. Box 310, Menlo Park, Ca 94025.

Selling 78 various Analogs 1962-1974. All in good condition. First $50.00 and they are yours. Richard Beaubien, 601 Wilder St., Lowell, Mass. 01851.

NEW: SCIENCE FICTION: THE CLASSROOM IN ORBIT by Beverly Friend. Text (not an anthology) contains exciting "probes", games, fan info and bibliographies. Write or call: Educational Impact, Box 355, Blackwood, N.J. 08012, (609) 228-3555. $3.75 each. Valuable supplement, $1.00 - both prepaid.

Only outer space newspaper published! First edition still available. $.20. 2nd edition, $.20. Up to 2 ordered add $.10 for postage. Bran Spankin Worlds, Box 29093, Chicago, Ill. 60629.

UNUSUAL Books! 40 for $3.00. Catalog Free! International, Box 7798 FSF, Atlanta, Ga. 30309.

JACK LONDON'S SCIENCE FICTION is the theme of Dale Walker's THE ALIEN WORLDS OF JACK LONDON. A pioneering study of London's four novels, two plays, and thirteen short stories of fantasy fiction. Paperback. $2.00 ppd. Wolf House, 1420 Pontiac, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506.

EDUCATION

FIRST NEW CALCULUS IN 300 YEARS. Send stamped-addressed envelope. Mathco, Rockport, Ma. 01966.

HONORARY DEGREES - Doctor of Divinity $15 donation. Satisfaction guaranteed. Free information. Church of Universal Brotherhood, 46311 Yucca, Ca. 90028.

HYPNOTISM

FREE Hypnotism, Self-Hypnosis, Sleep learning Catalog! Drawer G-400, Ruidoso, New Mexico 88345.

PLANTS

MYSTERIOUS SENSITIVE PLANTS. Folds leaves at a touch! Planter and plants. $.60. Auldaney, Box 6221-AW, Burbank, California 91510.

POETRY

PUBLISH YOUR POEMS—Our Guide tells How/Where. $2.50. LYF-SF, Box 1872, Milwaukee 53201.

SF CONVENTION

1975 WORLD SF CONVENTION, Melbourne — "Hugo" voting, membership, travel info — write Fred Patten, 11863 West Jefferson Blvd., Culver City, California 90230.

MISCELLANEOUS

ESP LABORATORY. This new research service group can help you. For FREE information write: Al G. Manning, ESP Laboratory, 7559 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angles, Calif. 90046.

FABULOUS FLYING STARS for Japanese martial arts target practice, as seen on Kung Fu. $3 (4 or more 30%) SHURIKEN, 144 West 19th Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10011.

STELLAR CONQUEST: Absorbing game of space-faring societies in conflict, 2-4 imaginative adults explore planets: develop super-technologies; industrialize, wage warship combat. 6 color plastic star map, 400 ship counters, and more. If S-F, STAR TREK, or games intrigue you, you'll always regret missing this. $8 US from: METAGAMING CONCEPTS, Box 15346-GT Austin, Texas 78761 (10 for brochure).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PSI POWER! Influence others without their knowledge. Develop Telepathy; Psychokinesis, OOBE (astral projection) and super memory. Details free. TEM-10, Box 6830, San Francisco, California 94101.

SPACE HUK - A multi-player, three dimensional spaceship war game featuring ship to ship sensing and firing. A non-playing gamesmaster required. Send $2.50 to INNOVATIONS, P.O. Box 6246, Virginia Beach, Va. 23456.

12 Astronomy color postcards and list $1.25, Craig's Postcards, P.O. Box 764, Palatine, Ill. 60067.

K.J.V. Bible records - 16 2/3 RPM, 67 at N.T. $14.00 at O.T. $36.00. Craig's Bibles, P.O. Box 764, Palatine, Ill. 60067.

ARTISTS graphic work, prints, etc. Original. Handprinted sample block print $1.00. Darling, 94 Torrington Ave., Collinsville, Ct. 06022.

PERSONALIZED GREETING CARDS! Information free, Tim-Mark Kards, Box 113, Estherville, Ia. 51334.

Braing tissue-Jayland Unilited, 220 Standish #1, Redwood, Ca. 94063, expression without representation, internally existing.

JAPANESE GIRLS MAKE Wonderful Wives. We have large number of listings. Many interested in marriage. Only $1.00 brings application, photos, names, descriptions, questionaire, etc. Japan International, Box 1181-FSF, Newport Beach, California 92663.

(*"For the Birds," from page 159*)

truthfully, though perhaps I should have said Manning.

"Well, you certainly missed the bird of all time: there was this crow who flew down to me and cawed; and this you're not going to believe: he went and picked a dandelion and brought it to me! What do you say to that?"

I shrugged.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

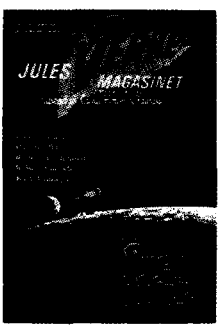
The Imprint of Quality

(since 1937)

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy AND Science Fiction

F&SF's readers are both young (84% under 45) and educated (62% have attended college). When they want relaxation or stimulation in reading, they turn to the best works of imagination and to FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION. "F&SF regularly supplies the finest the field has to offer in the way of short fiction"—*Clifton Fadiman*. Compelling fiction, along with informative and stimulating features on *Books* (James Blish) and *Science* (Isaac Asimov), have earned F&SF its reputation as tops in the field.



Swedish Edition

French Edition

German Edition

MERCURY PRESS, Inc., P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED